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**Doing things differently: institutionalising gender into a  
development organisation that works through volunteers**

***Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D)***

***in Development Studies***

**Amended April 30<sup>th</sup> 2005**

TEXT BOUND CLOSE TO THE SPINE IN  
THE ORIGINAL THESIS

dynamics and how these affect the negotiation process, this analysis is relevant for professional (or non voluntary) development agents in other development organisations, as they are also rooted in a framework of both personal and organisational values.



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## List of Acronyms

3As	Assumptions, Attribution, Accountability
CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resource Management
CBCRM	Community Based Coastal Resource Management
CSP	Country Strategic Plan
DFID	Department for International Development
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
GAD	Gender And Development
HOP	Head of Programmes
ISMT	International Senior Management Team
ISWID	Integrated Skills for Women in Development
MAGIC	Mainstreaming Gender and Implementing Change (ISWID follow-up)
NRM	Natural Resource Management
ODA	Overseas Development Administration
PA	Placement Advisor
PfC	Preparing for Change
RAISA	Regional AIDS Initiative of Southern Africa
RPM	Regional Programme Manager
RSO	Regional Support Officer
RV	Returned Volunteer
SCRUM	Skills for Community-based Resource Utilization and Management

SPARK	Sharing and Promotion of Awareness and Regional Knowledge
SMT	Senior Management Team
V+D	Volunteers and Development
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
VSOP	Voluntary Service Overseas – Philippines
VSOL	Voluntary Service Overseas - London
WAD	Women And Development
WID	Women In Development

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*The scene is a large paneled room in Roehampton, July 10th 2002. A PhD researcher has just finished a presentation to the International Senior Management Team (ISMT) of VSO. After the presentation there is a kind of depressed silence, followed by a few questions along the lines of 'are things really that bad?' and 'that's all very well, but what do we do about it?' The team seems to appreciate the presentation, but they are running late, and so don't have time to explore the implications, or discuss how these might be resourced.*

I don't have a transcript, but the scene above is my recollection of my presentation of initial research results to the International Senior Management Team (ISMT) of Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), in July 2002. My research results presented VSO senior managers with a set of issues, involving rethinking some basic assumptions about development, volunteering, and gender equality. Their reaction, given the challenges I had just presented, illustrates the considerable difficulties of institutionalising gender equality<sup>1</sup> into an operational development organisation such as VSO.

My main aim in this thesis is to contribute to the *understanding* of gender equality in volunteering and development, to explore the potential to effect institutional change in that direction, and to provide broader insights for other development and volunteer-sending organisations. The answer to the question 'are things really that bad?' in the illustrative scene presented above is both 'yes' and 'no'. At the time of this research, gender equality was not integrated into VSO's work, but this was also an opportunity to 'do' something about it. Gender equality was not prioritised as a 'development aim' in the 3<sup>rd</sup> VSO corporate strategic plan<sup>2</sup>, but my research indicates that a 'development

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<sup>1</sup> 'Institutionalising gender equality' is abbreviated to 'institutionalising gender' later in this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Despite being argued for by many members of staff.

aim' that purports to address gender issues might not have reflected an understanding of gender equality that was needed in order to make any real progress towards institutionalisation. Gender equality is, of course, an important development issue, but in the context of VSO it is also a very important volunteering issue. Even if there were no mention of gender equality in any strategic plans, at the corporate or country level, VSO would still face important gender issues every day. This is because, as I will argue, VSO is about volunteers and their relationships, and each volunteer is an individual development agent, subject to the norms and practices of social relations, including gender relations.

## **1.1 Locating the research and myself as the researcher**

### ***1.1.1 Collaborative research***

My presentation to the VSO ISMT was not primarily about tools or other practical changes to be made to the way in which VSO works, but it did contain considerable implications for practice. These implications can seem almost impossible to tackle – hence the questions to me. Changes that may be required are a large task for a development organisation with many day-to-day concerns. That VSO engaged at a senior level highlights the positive, collaborative relationship that existed between this academic researcher and the organisation that I was investigating, which was critically important to the success of the research. The collaborative nature of the project and the interest shown by VSO throughout the process was integral to deciding how best to carry out the research, to make it both revealing for me and relevant for them as an organisation. The relationship between research and practice was therefore a constant question, and the research worked as a process, as well as a product.

Thus, the research and VSO's own organisational priorities fed off one another



throughout the process. For example during my overseas fieldwork in the Philippines I was able to engage with some of the key questions facing both staff and volunteers, and from these emerged some of the central insights of my thesis: that gender was a fundamental part of how volunteers perceived and carried out their roles as development agents. Thus gender equality was not simply a development goal, it was also an important dimension of VSO as an organisation in terms of how it carried out its work through volunteers. During my fieldwork in the UK, I was able to engage with the corporate strategic planning process taking place within VSO. The engagement offered me the opportunity to gain insights into VSO's view of its identity and role, whilst at the same time some interview respondents were also able to think through some of the questions of institutionalising gender equality in the context of the interview. The process of this research, as well as the product, therefore contributed to people's thinking about gender relations and the possibility of eventual inclusion of gender equality at a more institutional and strategic level.

### ***1.1.2 Locating myself***

I came to this research after some years working in gender and development (GAD) and had my own assumptions about the meaning of 'gender equality'. As a feminist working in GAD I have often had a critical engagement with the 'development industry'. A single message from an Oxfam Conference on gender and development in 1994, sums up my own perspective:

*'Gender means doing things differently' (Reardon 1995, p. 4).*

Pearson (1992) points out that development policy and practice is always gendered:

*'[W]hether it is recognized or not, development process or policy inevitably affects and is affected by the relations between the genders in any society. All*

*policies, however technical or neutral they may appear to be, will have gendered implications. One task is to understand how different aspects of social and economic organisation are already based on a system of gender relations and thus to clarify how assumptions about the roles of men and women form the backdrop against which policies are formulated, even if these assumptions remain unspoken and unacknowledged' (Pearson 1992, p. 292).*

Thus in order to understand how development policy and practice can address gender issues, we have to think differently about how development itself is constructed and carried out. Moreover, gender relations are not simply to be taken into account in the goals of development; they are equally part of the backdrop for development organisations and development agents. 'Gender equality' is thus not just about what organisations or individuals do in their development work, it is also about who does it, and how they do it in both their 'public' and 'private' lives. For this reason, in this thesis I have focused on the role of individuals and individual agency, which has been a little researched area in the literature on gender and development.

However, my focus goes further than individuals and their relationships in their public and private lives. In a discussion group at a VSO feedback workshop, held in May 2002, I had an exchange that illustrates the very core of the problem with which I have been grappling throughout this research. The group (including myself as the researcher) was discussing how far it is possible for VSO to regulate a volunteer's behaviour in her or his private life. The debate was that VSO cannot justify regulating volunteer behaviour in the private sphere, because it does not regulate the private behaviour of its staff. However, for both staff and volunteers there is an assumption that people working in an organisation that is based on values concerning justice and equality, will share those

values in their personal as well as their professional lives<sup>3</sup>. This means that the importance of relationships in development is both individual and collective. And it is this understanding of how individual behaviour and attitudes are important for the collective of the organisation that has been the central concern of this thesis, providing a real opportunity to address gender equality on an institutional and strategic level.

### ***1.1.3 A definition of gender***

‘Gender’ signifies the social (rather than biological) construction of men and women, and relations between men and women. Whitehead (1979) refers to gender relations in different categories: gender as experienced (‘gender, like race, is never absent’ Whitehead 1979, p.11); gender ascriptive relationships (in which ‘to describe the position is to describe the gender’ *ibid.* p.11); and relations in which gender is characteristic (‘it is not necessary to be a man or a woman to do the activity, but empirically the genders are differentially recruited’ *ibid.* p.11). In practice the term ‘gender’ has often been used to denote women and women’s issues, but this misses out the vital element of the relationships:

*‘Gender relations are part of social relations, referring to the ways in which the social categories of men and women, male and female, relate over the whole range of social organization, not just to interactions between individual men and women in the sphere of personal relationships ...*

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<sup>3</sup> These tensions are illustrated by the problems posed when staff or other representatives of an organisation working on HIV/AIDS are themselves HIV positive, and do not disclose. People *do* hold immense contradictions within themselves. It is not my intention here to judge, merely to point out the more structural implications of understanding these contradictions in the institutionalisation of gender equality into an organisation such as VSO.

*'[G]ender relations [also] describe the social meaning of being male and female, and thus what is considered appropriate behaviour or activity for men and women' (Pearson 2000, p. 385)*

A defining feature of the social relations of gender is inequality – or the relative power of one gender in relation to the other. Power inequalities exist between men and women, and between men/women and the social/economic/political context in which they operate. Pearson goes on to emphasise that what is considered male or female can vary considerably between cultural contexts, and can also have strong ideological connotations, which can (and do) change over time and in different geographical and cultural situations. The relative power of men and women in society is further defined by other aspects of their social positions, such as wealth, class, ethnicity and age.

Men and women thus have different roles and interests. The terms 'practical and strategic interests' were originally used by Molyneux (1985) to reflect an understanding of women's participation in the Nicaraguan revolution of the 1970s, and the way in which the revolution demanded that women subordinate their specific interests to the broader goals of the revolution:

*'Practical gender interests... arise from the concrete conditions of women's positioning within the gender division of labor ... Practical interests are usually a response to an immediate perceived need, and they do not generally entail a strategic goal such as women's emancipation or gender equality' (Molyneux 1985, p. 233).*

*'Strategic interests are derived ... from an analysis of women's subordination and from the formulation of an alternative, more satisfactory set of arrangements to those which exist ... The demands that are formulated on this*

*basis are usually termed 'feminist' as is the level of consciousness required to struggle effectively for them' (ibid. p.232)*

The relationship between practical and strategic interests encapsulates the differences that are found between women, and how their interests differ according to their situation. Common interests between women are not 'natural', and solidarity is not automatic between women who might share strategic interests:

*'[Interests] are historically and culturally constituted, reflecting, but not reducible to, the specific social placement and priorities of particular groups of women; they [are] also... politically and discursively constructed' (Molyneux 1998, p.75).*

There are also qualitative differences between the discourse of interests and the discourse of needs that is more frequently found in development (Kabeer 1994). Needs are a function of experience, whereas interests exist whether or not they are perceived within a person's experience. Needs suggest the welfare principles of development aid, whereas interests arise specifically from power relations in a structural sense and suggest a more political approach to development aid, based on ideas of empowerment (Kabeer 1994, p.296). It is in this more political and strategic sense that I refer to gender equality, incorporating a notion of gender interests, both practical and strategic, in both public and private spheres.

In this thesis, I use the term 'gendered' to express the idea that gender relations are an intrinsic dimension of how individuals' identities and behaviours are constructed, and to indicate the implicit and explicit ways that gender informs and is informed by the organisations and institutions through which social life is organised. It is often suggested that male activity and interests are predominantly located in the public

sphere, and women's activity and interests in the private. In this thesis, I examine both the public and the private to illuminate *assumptions* of male and female roles, interests, and behaviour associated with public and private spheres, based on accepted norms and practices, which together make up social institutions. Institutions are not only gendered in that they relate to roles and behaviour of men and women; they are also gendered because they signify different allocations of power to different interests in a particular context.

In this thesis, I also refer to the institutionalisation of gender equality - or, as a short hand, to the institutionalisation of gender. By this, I mean fundamental changes in norms, values and behaviours needed to move from an awareness of gender inequality to changes in practices to bring about greater gender equality.

## **1.2 Focus of the research and research questions**

Initially my focus was to identify a particular process of organisational learning, in which it was claimed that gender equality had been negotiated, to see how successfully this had been achieved. I designed a set of research questions and an initial hypothesis emerged based on a review of the literature and reflecting some of my own background and assumptions. However, whilst reporting from a pilot fieldwork trip to the VSO Philippines country programme – a case study on learning with respect to gender equality within VSO - challenges emerged to both my own assumptions and to those of some of the respondents, particularly around what 'gender equality' might mean in the context of VSO and its development work<sup>4</sup>.

Firstly I had assumed that 'gender equality' would be found within VSO's development

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<sup>4</sup> Challenging assumptions was an important part of my methodology, and I considered it integral to the

analysis. Secondly I had assumed that VSO was essentially a volunteer-sending agency and that resistance to becoming a fully-fledged development organisation<sup>5</sup> would be the cause of its blocks to learning on gender equality. This was confirmed by some of my interviews with VSO-Philippines staff members, who identified blocks to institutionalising gender equality in VSO-Philippines as being connected to the primary organisational practice of volunteer-sending. I had also assumed that VSO as an organisation might have differing relationships with other organisations (I was specifically expecting to find differences between its relationships with mainstream development organisations and feminist organisations in the Philippines) mediated by volunteers. However I had not specifically problematised the relationship between VSO and its volunteers, other than to see them as representatives of its development work. During my pilot fieldwork in the Philippines it was the individual volunteers that emerged as a core element of change (both as actors of change, and constraints to change). The focus of my research therefore changed from programmes to individual agents in the context of development.

Following this change in focus, my study of VSO as a development organisation included investigating the practice of volunteering in development. This has involved recognising the values-based relationship between individuals and collectivities, and the importance of this for negotiating changes to understandings of gender equality in VSO. I thus wanted to see not only how the understanding of gender equality is affected by institutionalised assumptions about gender relations, but also whether there might be some potential for change through a process of negotiated learning between individuals and collectivities.

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way I was working (Thomas, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> The tensions in VSO's identity between volunteer-sending and development are explored later in this

The main research question for this thesis was: how can gender equality be negotiated through organisational learning, leading to institutional change processes in the context of volunteering in development?

In order to investigate this over-arching question, I developed the following sub-questions:

- How is gender equality understood in the context of volunteering in development?
- How is knowledge and understanding of gender equality negotiated in the relationship between VSO and volunteers?
- What is the potential for organisational learning with respect to gender equality and change processes to be integrated into normal practice?

Chapter 3 describes in full the methodology and methods pursued to investigate these questions.

My thesis takes the individual development agent as the main subject of analysis. In doing this I have developed an understanding of how individuals are located within development organisations, and the impact of gendered individuals in all areas of their work and ‘private’ lives. I therefore address the problem of how far we maintain a division between who we are and what we do, and how this is reflected in our organisations. A study of VSO and its volunteers presents interesting dimensions of this issue. First, they are volunteers 24 hours per day and so can’t ‘clock out’. This aspect has given me the opportunity to focus on individual development agents in the totality of their lives. Secondly, although the 24 hour per day nature of volunteering is accepted

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thesis.



by VSO, it is a development organisation and buys into the assumptions associated with the practice of UK development organisations, which has implications for VSO's ability to take responsibility for, or learn from, the experience of volunteers outside of the public sphere of their development work. Finally, volunteering highlights the relationship between organisational and personal values. This exposes gender relations in a way that helps to question and potentially change accepted norms and practices. This study has therefore been an opportunity to understand how individual development practitioners and development organisations relate to each other and to the contexts in which they live and work.

### **1.3 Structure of the thesis**

In Chapter 2 I examine a broad range of literature in relation to the research problem. To do this I have linked literature addressing gender, feminism and development, the role of power relations, volunteering in development, and organisational learning and change. I have used these literatures to build an understanding of gendered agency in development, of gendered interests in public/private spheres, and an understanding of gendered relationships between individuals and organisations in the context of development. The analysis of these literatures also led to the development of the hypothesis I used to carry out this research, which is explained in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 sets out in detail my methodological approach, including discussion of feminist epistemology, a constructivist approach to research, the particular case study strategy that I have used, and a full description of methods. In this chapter I also set out my research hypothesis (based on the theoretical analysis of Chapter 2), and the research questions I used in order to carry out the research. I then identify the particular challenges I have faced in the process of the research. This chapter illustrates the

breadth of perspectives that have been included, and the central role played by VSO in the research process.

Chapter 4 gives a brief background of VSO as an organisation in order to set the context for the research. I first outline the origins of VSO as an organisation to give some historical perspective, before looking at the recent changes that have taken it from being purely a volunteer-sending organisation to being to a development organisation. I then look at some of the current debates and questions within the organisation, particularly concerning the identity and role of volunteers.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 discuss and analyse the data gathered for the thesis, looking both at how my research questions have been answered, and also at how my original hypothesis has been confirmed or challenged. Each of these data chapters includes a broad range of data sources in order to present different perspectives and illustrate the arguments I am making in the thesis. Chapter 5 looks first at questions of development and gender relations, arguing that the pervasive assumptions that underpin the practice of development organisations include a separation between development work and the agents implementing this work, but in the context of VSO this separation is challenged by the centrality of the individual development agents - the volunteers – to the organisation.

Then in Chapter 6 I look in detail at the gender relations of volunteering in development. I identify some of the assumptions bound up in the norms and practices of volunteer roles and behaviour that are embedded in the ‘deep structure’<sup>6</sup> of VSO, and I discuss the idea that because these are constructed, they can also be challenged. I add to these ideas by identifying the importance of values and the commitment of volunteers

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<sup>6</sup> What I mean by the ‘deep structure’ of VSO is discussed in the next chapter (Chapter 2).

working in development, and how this affects the relationship of individuals to the collectivity of the organisation with which they are associated. I argue that, because they rely on volunteer commitment and 'buy in', the relationships are characterised by a more nuanced structure of power within VSO than I had initially thought.

Chapter 7 discusses issues of organisational learning, in particular the constraints and opportunities that I have identified to learning on gender equality in VSO. Learning is a part of the activity of volunteering, and can either reflect and reinforce existing power structures, or be used to challenge and change them. Accountability, because it involves explaining and reviewing actions, is an important pre-requisite for institutional learning on gender. However, accountability poses a particular challenge in VSO, while offering opportunities for learning in the context of volunteering. I argue that volunteering in development, given the more nuanced structure of power relations identified in Chapter 6, offers the opportunity to undertake negotiated learning processes. Through such learning the norms and practices of gender relations in volunteering have the potential to be challenged and changed.

Finally, Chapter 8 discusses how my findings respond and add to my research questions and hypothesis. The findings focus on: the role of individual agency in development; power in the context of volunteering in development; and the roles of learning and accountability in managing voluntary action. I set out in this study to learn more about development organisations and gender equality. By studying volunteers and volunteering I have had an opportunity to examine both the role of individual agents in development and the relationship between individuals and organisations. These issues are discussed, and, together with a final review of the research questions and confirmation of my working hypothesis, they conclude my thesis.

## **1.4 Conclusion to Chapter 1**

This PhD research has given me the opportunity to explore and discuss some of the tensions and contradictions that emerge when development is interrogated from a feminist perspective. It has provided insights to the role of individual agency in development, and added new elements to the understanding of the relationships that exist between individuals and organisations. This research thus contributes to the knowledge and understanding of gender relations in development. Although I have provided no practical tools or frameworks, VSO can use these insights to develop further their own understanding of gender equality, and what it means for their work and their relationship with volunteers. Finally, this thesis holds broader insights for other development organisations and the people who work with and for them, as well as for other volunteer-sending organisations who are working in the context of development.

## **Chapter 2: Thinking differently about gender equality, individual agency, and organisational change**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Gender relations reflect norms and practices about the roles and behaviours of men and women which are both embedded in, and perpetuated by, social institutions. Institutions are not static, but continually contested and negotiated by individual men and women, as they experience them in both public and private spheres of their lives. This thesis argues that although an organisation may pursue a gender policy through practices such as audits and checklists, it may still overlook the gender relations of the individual men and women who are the development agents acting on behalf of the organisation. The assumptions, beliefs and behaviours of the people who act as development agents are central to the work that they carry out. Rethinking or institutionalising new understandings of gender equality involves challenging both organisational structures and the nature of individual agency.

Institutionalising gender equality thus requires rethinking the roles and relations of individuals within organisations. In the context of this research, individuals play a particularly important part in the life and social goals of the organisation, based as it is on the work of volunteers. In this chapter I examine the idea of volunteering and what it means to be a volunteer, identifying the importance of values in their identity. Values are not exclusive to volunteers, however volunteers represent a particular opportunity to examine the importance of values for individuals working in development. The role of values suggests that the relationship between an individual volunteer and the collectivity of the organisation is more than a contractual set of obligations. I argue therefore that a view of development organisations and individual development agents that is based on

the existence of shared values and objectives, is more appropriate than a view based on individualised interests.

This means that organisational learning cannot be seen as a process of handing out change to individual agents (for example through policies), or even as a process of changing individual agents (for example through training). The central role played by individual as well as organisational values means that organisational learning becomes more of a process of negotiation between organisations and individual agents.

Organisational learning processes that are based on shared values and beliefs allow for negotiation of norms and practices, and open up the possibility of a more permeable boundary between the public and private spheres of people's lives. However, organisational learning on gender equality will also be subject to resistance from entrenched beliefs and behaviours as well as power relations. An understanding of power is thus central to this thesis.

This chapter will examine these ideas in relation to existing literature and debates on gender relations, feminism, and development, the role of power relations, volunteering in development, and organisational change. It will use the phrase 'institutionalising gender equality' (or 'institutionalising gender') to mean a process of rethinking and institutionalising new norms and practices in gender relations. Institutionalisation is not understood as an end state, but as an ongoing process of change.

## **2.2 Re-thinking gender relations in development**

Addressing gender concerns in development policy has been framed progressively by three main conceptualisations: Women in Development (WID) in the 1970s, Women and Development (WAD) in the late 1970s, and Gender and Development (GAD) in the 1980s and 1990s. Much of the literature around these conceptualisations has focused on

the role of structures in women's subordination (Boserup 1970; Young et al. 1981; Tinker 1990; Wallace 1991; Moser 1993; Visvanathan et al. 1997). However, to understand and bring about institutional changes in the gendered norms and practices of people working in development, an examination of individual agency is also essential. Individual agents, in so far as they are identified in the development literature, are often assumed to accept norms and practices associated with contemporary development discourse, which is mainly concerned with the public domain<sup>7</sup>. Because it is concerned with the relationship between public and private, and with structures of institutionalised power found in organisations, a feminist perspective offers the possibility of examining the role of individuals in development in both perpetuating and contesting gendered norms and practices in both public and private spheres.

### ***2.2.1 Gender in development: WID/WAD/GAD and beyond***

This sub-section examines the WID/WAD/GAD literature from the perspective of feminist analysis of gender relations in development, and identifies the gap left for the examination of the role of individual practitioners working in development.

Over the last 30 years there has been a continuing movement of feminist critics, whose aims are still as they were originally:

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<sup>7</sup> The scope of this thesis focuses on gender and feminist perspectives on development and does not include a general analysis of development discourse. However, it is important to acknowledge that development discourse is dynamic, and that there are literatures (one example is Chambers 1997) which do engage with individual agents and their role in contesting accepted norms and practices. Some of these ideas, such as participatory development, have become embedded in contemporary development discourse, which continues to change in response to these kinds of challenges. However, this literature does not specifically refer to the relationship between individuals and organisations, or to the participation of individuals in institutionalised gender relations in public and private spheres.

*'... to develop better analytical and conceptual tools for the development of a theory of social relations which would encompass not only the so-called economic relations of society but also what have been called the relations of everyday life.' (Young et al. 1981, p. viii)*

This aim arose from the Subordination of Women workshop (or SOW) which was held in 1978, and sought to understand gender issues, and problematise social relations in developing countries (Jackson and Pearson 1998, pp.2-3). Since this time, gender issues have been incorporated into the discourse and the practice of development through the successive uses of WID, WAD and GAD approaches (Jackson and Pearson 1998, Porter and Judd 1999).

Esther Boserup's (1970) economic analysis of women's agricultural production challenged how 'work' was conceptualised in development. After much contestation and lobbying for these ideas, this led to the approach by development agencies known as Women In Development (WID), which attempted to integrate women into the practice of development (Jackson and Pearson 1998, p.2). However, the WID approach, although making visible women's roles and recognising the effect of development interventions on them, kept what became known as 'women's issues' separate, with the result that their interests were often marginalised. Women And Development (WAD) was an attempt to bring the role of women in the development process to the fore, without marginalising them, by recognising their relationship to development:

*'The WAD perspective... focus[es] on the relationship of women to development, rather than simply devising strategies to incorporate them. WAD recognized women as important economic actors, and emphasized the informal and unrecognized work that women do in the household and outside the formal economy.' (Porter 1999, p. 10)*



Gender And Development (GAD) analysis built on the WAD analysis, by putting the emphasis on the relationships between women and men, and the inequalities between them.

*'It allowed consideration of both men's and women's roles and responsibilities, and emphasized the relationship between men and women in the development process. It also allowed political, social and cultural factors, as well as economic ones, to have a place within the analysis.'* (ibid. p.10).

Although generally seen as a positive and progressive move, critics of the change in terminology from women to gender see this as a de-politicisation of the WID/WAD project, taking the focus off women (Jackson and Pearson 1998, p.5). However, GAD analysis does also move the WID/GAD project forwards, because it extends the focus on gender throughout the development project, from the micro concerns of women's daily lives right up to the macro-economic policies of national and international governments and multi-lateral agencies (ibid.).

Gender analysts have also traced the incorporation of WID/WAD/GAD into development policy approaches (Moser 1993).<sup>8</sup> Some GAD analysts have developed a

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<sup>8</sup> This began with the 'welfare approach' of the 1960s and 1970s, where strategies focused on women's role as mothers, and the 'equity' approach, which emphasised the diversity of women's situations and the need for equality based on different realities. The 'anti-poverty' approach was developed as a result of understandings of the experience of poverty, and this approach saw the beginnings of many micro-credit and small enterprise development schemes to address women's needs (particularly female heads of household), often identified as 'the poorest of the poor'. The 'efficiency approach' maximised women's contribution to national productivity, without taking into account the 'double-day' of paid work and domestic responsibilities. The 'empowerment approach' originated among Southern feminists who took a 'standpoint' perspective, taking into account the multiple aspects of discrimination faced by women, including race and class as well as gender (Moser 1993).

number of frameworks and tools to try to ensure that gender analysis is included in development planning and implementation processes<sup>9</sup>. Whilst there exists much transformative work carried out using different tools<sup>10</sup>, many frameworks developed and used over the past 30 years have tended to become mechanistic when incorporated into the work of development organisations, doing little to ‘challenge the existing gender roles or the allocation of power between men and women’ (Porter 1999, p. 11). Thus although gender analysis has done much to make visible women’s realities within the development process, frameworks and tools are often used as challenges to how development is carried out, rather than challenges to the way in which development is understood. Thus WID/WAD/GAD approaches have often in practice represented the management of gender concerns within development as it is currently constructed, rather than reframing or rethinking the discourse of development (Thomas 1999). More particularly, there has been no analysis of the role of individual agency.

There have, however, been alternative approaches. For example, Mohanty (1991) and other feminists writing within a post-colonialist perspective (such as Gayatri Spivak (1988, 1991) and Trinh Minh-Ha (1987, 1989)) have developed theoretical frameworks for understanding the interconnections between race, gender, and colonialism, and their implications for understanding individual experience in relation to the development project (Kothari 2002b, p.46). It is this idea of individual experience that I examine in the next sub-section.

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<sup>9</sup> Such as the ‘Women’s Empowerment Framework’ (Longwe), the Triple Roles Framework (Moser), the Gender Analysis Matrix, and many others (March et al. 1999).

<sup>10</sup> For some recent perspectives on the incorporation of gender analysis in development, see contributions to Cornwall et al. 2004

### *2.2.2 Agency and structure: insights from feminist engagement with development*

In this sub-section I look at how individual experience has been located in development, how feminists have responded to this notion of the individual development subject, and the implications this has for understanding how individual agents relate to the structures of social and cultural institutions that surround them. I then argue that in terms of development practitioners, although gender and development literature addresses the notion of individual feminist practitioners, the role of non-feminist development practitioners remains a gap in the literature.

The notion of individual development subjects' roles and behaviour has been formed by traditional economic development discourse through the dominance of 'economic man' as the subject (Porter 1995, p.70). Norms and practices associated with development discourse continue to contain assumptions about individual subjects' roles and behaviours (including assumptions about gender roles and behaviours, see Elson 1991, 1998 and Bakker 1999). Thus although many development interventions promise to address social and economic inequalities, inclusion in such processes might actually reinforce embedded structures of inequality (Crewe and Harrison 1999). However, Porter (1995) argues that there exists an 'interpretive community' of development agents (ibid. p.84), who are both subjects of development and practitioners, who can and do interact with both the discourse and the practice of development, contesting and challenging these notions (ibid. p.86). This relates to the intersection between agency and structure, where individuals are 'knowledgeable agents', who interact with the structures of society in which they operate (Giddens 1984)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> In Giddens' (1984) theory of structure and agency, people have discursive consciousness (where individuals can justify their actions), practical consciousness (where people reflexively produce and reproduce social interactions), and the unconscious (what people take for granted). Of these Giddens

Development discourse and practice are in fact much contested, and given meaning in different contexts (Cornwall 2002, Mercer 1999). The contestation of discourse characterises it as a form of action, and reflects insights on the complexities of social interaction, and the constantly shifting boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Feminist analysis offers opportunities to challenge the underlying assumptions of much development discourse, for example in the work of DAWN (Sen and Grown 1987)<sup>12</sup>. The relationship between feminist theorists and development has therefore been a process of active negotiation and contested priorities (Porter 1999, pp.9-11), in which feminists have challenged, and attempted to bring about fundamental changes, in the understandings, norms and practices of development (Porter 1999, Jackson and Pearson 1998).

However, Smyth (1999) identifies how feminist analysis has been excluded from many approaches to gender which have emerged in development organisations – seen for example in the reluctance of development organisations to enter the private sphere of the household and address the power relations within, and the silence that surrounds violence against women (ibid. p. 21). The process of including an understanding of gender relations has often resulted in the misrepresentation of feminist analysis of gender relations in order to exclude its more political analysis. But Smyth returns gender analysis to the ‘micro-politics of women’s lives and daily struggles’, and the need to transform the norms and practices of the institutions which govern their

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emphasised the practical consciousness, which enabled people to mediate between the structures of rules and norms and their own actions (Tucker 1998, pp. 75-85).

<sup>12</sup> DAWN (‘Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era’) is ‘a network of activists, researchers, and policy makers... committed to developing alternative frameworks and methods to attain the goals of economic and social justice, peace and development free of all forms of oppression by gender, class, race, and nation’ (Sen and Grown 1987, p. 9).

expectations and behaviours. Here, Smyth concludes, feminism and gender are complementary (ibid. pp.27-28). The importance of Smyth's analysis for this thesis is the contribution that feminist thought makes to gender and development analysis in emphasising how gender relations affect how individual people's lives are experienced – and how those experiences (of domestic violence, for example) might have been previously excluded from the priorities of many development organisations. But by using the space provided by feminist analysis and focusing on individual experience as well as structural analysis, these excluded areas can be recognised and addressed within development work. Thus it is not only at the structural level of development discourse that feminists have challenged assumptions, but also at the level of the individual and her/his experience of those structures.

Feminist gender analysts have also problematised men and masculinities in the understanding of the norms and behaviours associated with gender relations at the individual level. This focus on masculinities not only allows a study of the reality of men's lives in their relationships with women, with children, and with other men (White 1997, p.17), but enables an analysis of power relations of individual men and women who might conform to, or contest, gendered assumptions of behaviour. In so doing these authors draw attention to the idea that it is not the biological categories of male and female so much as 'certain ways of being and behaving that are associated with dominance and power' (Cornwall 1997, 11)<sup>13</sup>, and therefore more or less 'included'. This relates to how individuals experience and live structures of power, as well as to how in their everyday interactions, collectivities and individuals negotiate and agree on power structures, and in so doing perpetuate entrenched gender relations. Building on

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<sup>13</sup> White (1997) uses Margaret Thatcher to illustrate that gendered power is a set of values, in this case espoused by a woman, portraying male members of her cabinet who didn't agree with her as 'wets' (White 1997, p. 20).

these understandings of the ‘micro-politics of people’s lives’ (Smyth 1999, p.27), it is possible to see the tension that exists within every individual between the public and private spheres of their life and work. This allows an appreciation of the different degrees of conformity that each individual negotiates within an overall institutional structure.

Most of the literature on individual agency thus relates to the subjects (or recipients) of development as active agents (see also Marchand and Parpart 1995, Guijt and Shah 1998, Khanna 1999, Mercer 1999). There is another body of literature that relates specifically to the role of feminist<sup>14</sup> agents, and what they can or might achieve within organisations (Porter and Judd 1999, Goetz 1997, Miller and Razavi 1998, Rao et al. 1999), which will be discussed later in this chapter (Section 2.3.3). An analysis of the individual agency of practitioners more widely<sup>15</sup> however, has not been at the forefront of writing on gender and development. But the role of development practitioners as individuals living and experiencing gender relations can be seen as central to a feminist understanding of gender relations in development organisations. The gender and development literature often pictures individual development agents as part of the development process itself, and therefore subjects to be changed in the course of incorporating an understanding of gender equality into development discourse and practice.<sup>16</sup> Development practitioners are thus presented as subject to the discursive

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<sup>14</sup> In many of these texts, the agents might not necessarily describe themselves as ‘feminist’. I use the term ‘feminist’ here to indicate agents who are aware of gender inequalities and who show a willingness to work to change unequal gender relations.

<sup>15</sup> This is the broader group of individuals who might not feel strongly either way, but who are nevertheless subject to the same institutionalised structures surrounding gender relations in their lives and work.

<sup>16</sup> There are notable exceptions to this trend, including Goetz (1997) who will be discussed in the following section.

power of the development organisations of which they form a part. However, although ‘included’ in the development process, these individual agents can also be active proponents and negotiators of change, often through processes of organisational learning and change.<sup>17</sup>

## **2.3 Power and gender relations in development**

This section focuses on the potential presented by development practitioners to exhibit agency in order to negotiate new norms and practices in both public and private spheres. The following sections examine three elements of gender relations in development and development organisations that can influence or be influenced by individual agency: firstly, how the relationship between public and private has been conceptualised in the literature on gender and development; secondly, the power relations, including discursive power relations, on which individuals are able to draw in order to negotiate their different interests; and thirdly, how gender relations are embedded in organisations, and both constrain and provide opportunities for individual action.

### **2.3.1 Public/private spheres and gender relations**

This sub-section examines how assumptions about public and private spheres are embedded in institutionalised understandings of gender relations.

- *‘Institutions are complexes of norms and behaviours that persist over time by serving collectively valued purposes.’ (Uphoff 1986, p. 9)*
- *‘Institutions exert themselves through rules, norms and values that influence people’s lives.’ (Fowler et al. 1992, pp. 14-15)*

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<sup>17</sup> See Section 5 of this chapter.

Institutions, although they also create tensions which can lead to change, generally perpetuate power and interests, for which there is a high transaction cost to change (Powell and DiMaggio 1991, p.4). They shape power structures, and are 'rule-like', giving the impression of no other choice (ibid. pp.7-11). Institutionalised norms and practices are therefore normalised and can only be recognised when they are contested (ibid. p.20).

Gender relations are embedded in institutions that reflect and perpetuate assumptions about the roles and behaviour of men and women. Assumptions about inherent differences between men and women have permeated much of British social science since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and are usually based on the biological 'facts' that women lactate and bear children and so their activities have been assumed to be limited by the responsibilities of childcare (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974, p.14). These essentialist assumptions led to a view of the social and economic world as being divided between the public (male) sphere of paid work and politics, and the private (female) sphere of the home and domestic life, translating into many different contexts, but always linking power with male 'culturally legitimated authority' (rather than with specific activities) (Rosaldo 1974, p. 21). The division between public and private has been translated in other forms of this analysis into what has been called the 'productive/reproductive' domains, with the domestic or 'reproductive' sphere seen as essential to the survival of capitalism.<sup>18</sup> However Young et al. have argued that women's domestic role in many societies is not purely reproductive work (Young etc. 1979, pp. 2-3), while Harris also states that the economic division between productive/reproductive work is not sufficient

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<sup>18</sup> The complexity of the interactions between the productive and reproductive spheres is not the scope of this thesis. Early discussions include the contributions to *Of Marriage and the Market* (Young et al. 1981) (some of whom have also written more recently), and other more recent discussions include Nancy Folbre's *Who pays for the kids* (1994).



to explain the unequal value and status attached to these roles (Harris 1981, p.65).

The public/private divide, and its relationship to wider patriarchal society is key to understanding women's subordination (Young et al. 1981, p. x), and feminists from the 1970s onwards have rejected its 'natural' inevitability, and the unequal value attached to the different sets of activities, maintaining that as cultural constructs these roles can be changed (Oakley 1972, Ortner 1974, Mackintosh 1981). Feminist analysts, such as Kabeer (1994), also argue that institutionalised gender relations must also be seen in the context of other social relations:

*'While 'gender is never absent', it is never present in its pure form. It is always interwoven with other social inequalities such as class and race, and has to be analysed through a holistic framework if the concrete conditions of life for different groups of women and men are to be understood'. (Kabeer 1994, p.65)*

But it is only by uncovering the interconnections between the public and private spheres of society, that the social relations of gender can be seen to mediate how individuals experience structural forces of society (Kabeer 1994, p. 54).

The public/private division can also be seen in terms of relations which might not be 'gender ascriptive', but which are 'bearers of gender' (Elson and Pearson 1981, p.152). Different roles may not require a biologically male or female sex, but are assigned to a particular *gender* on the basis of accepted social norms. There exist therefore certain 'hegemonic' masculinities and femininities (Connell 1987) in each society, which link women's subordination with female attributes, gained through a process of socialisation (Elson and Pearson 1981, p.155). Kabeer builds on Elson and Pearson's (1981) analysis, arguing that even when women enter the public sphere, their roles are often associated with the skills acquired in the private sphere, and the apparently gender neutral concept

of a 'job' contains the gender based division of labour and demands the separation of family and public sphere work:

*'Gender does not have to be a contractual aspect of particular positions within the occupational structure for it to enter nonetheless through implicit rules and practices.'* (ibid. p.60)

The problem is not therefore that women have not been integrated, but that they have been integrated into an inherently hierarchical and contradictory structure of institutionalised gender inequality.

*'Gender as a power relation derives from institutional arrangements which provide men, of a given social group, with greater capacity than women from that group to mobilize institutional rules and resources to promote and defend their own interests. ... Since the power relations between women and men are the product of institutional practice, genuine change entails institutional transformation.'* (ibid. p. 299)

However, institutions are not static, but constantly recreated through processes of bargaining and negotiation. Norms can therefore be re-negotiated to change the terms under which women operate in public life, and the organisational forms in which institutions are incorporated and reproduced (ibid. p. 283).

This thesis will also argue that focusing on gender relations purely in the context of public life limits what is understood by the institutionalisation of gender equality into development. It builds on the insights from Kabeer's work, by identifying and examining the division between public and private spheres and institutionalised gender inequality in the context of the work and the lives of individual development practitioners. It also adds to GAD analysis by identifying the need to understand how

the gender relations of individuals are framed in contemporary development discourse and practice, and the roles and behaviour of individual development actors – in their private as well as their public lives.

### ***2.3.2 Power and gender relations***

This sub-section considers the nature of power relations that underpin gender inequality, and their significance for this thesis. Constructions of power are based on the existence of what Lukes (1974) identified as different views of power: the one dimensional view of power understood as the existence of observable conflict of interests in decision making (Lukes 1974, p.15); the two dimensional view of power understood as overtly or covertly observable conflict over which interests are considered in decision making, i.e. the exclusion of interests from the agenda (ibid. p.20); and the three dimensional view of power which includes the existence of unobservable (latent) conflict between the expressed interests of some and the real (if unexpressed) interests of others (ibid. pp.24-25). ‘Power over’ in Lukes’ analysis therefore relates to a conflict of interests (actual or latent), and ‘power to’ refers to a capacity to exert power, rather than the relationship itself (ibid. p. 31).

Both Rowlands (1997) and Kabeer (1994) have reflected on Lukes’ analysis from a feminist perspective. Power within much gender and development analysis is ‘power over’: thus women’s power will come from their inclusion in decision-making positions within the economic and political structures of society, from which they are better able to assert their interests (Rowlands 1997, p.11). However, Rowlands suggests that this reflects a liberal feminist position, in which the understanding of power does not involve structural change: power is something that women gain within existing structures (ibid. p.12). Kabeer (1994) suggests that ‘power over’ can also denote the power to exclude issues from the agenda, which shifts the focus from the individual

exercise of power to its institutionalised basis, creating norms and practices that are accepted and followed without observable conflict, as they are considered 'normal'. This structural understanding of power illustrates the way in which gender divisions are seen as non-negotiable, and women's bargaining happens in a context of an overall power structure which remains unchanged. Unseen gender biases are implicit in the roles and practices of social institutions, so that overt discrimination is not necessary (Kabeer 1994, p. 226).

But feminist visions of power (and empowerment) involve different kinds of power. 'Power to' can also be understood as the ability to encourage or facilitate a group of people with leadership skills (Rowlands 1997, p.12). This implies a non-finite understanding of power, where there is an increasing stock of power available to all participants. But moving beyond these traditional understandings of power, two other types of power are particularly relevant for feminist analysis: 'power from within', which reflects self-recognition and analysis of strategic gender interests (Kabeer 1994, p. 229); and 'power with', which is a collective identity giving ideological basis to gender subordination (ibid. p. 253). An understanding of 'power within' and 'power with' recognises how women can uncover the socially constructed and shared basis of apparently individual problems. These are crucially different ways of seeing the world and how people operate within it. Feminist ideas of empowerment fall within these alternative visions, which are also important for understanding the different kinds and sources of power examined in this thesis. For example, it will be argued later in this thesis that whilst many volunteers might see themselves as on almost the lowest level of the VSO organisational hierarchy, they do have a sense of 'power within' gained from their own sense of personal growth and confidence.

Power can be activated and experienced in many forms. One of them is discourse,

which produces meanings, reinforced by cultural and social norms and vice versa. Claims to authority are constructed through discourse, reproducing underlying value, knowledge and power systems. Kabeer argues that development discourse constructs knowledge that prioritises activity in the productive sphere (ibid. p.74), and so entrenches social relations that disadvantage women and exclude alternative analysis (such as the need to change capitalist economic and social structures in order to address gender inequalities). Development discourse found in development organisations is cross-cut with the value-base of these organisations which infuses their discourse with a moral imperative (to be ‘fighting poverty’, for example). The values-based discourse of development organisations could potentially either reinforce or challenge the more generalised economic discourse of development. Thus a more thorough understanding of discourse incorporates an understanding of the intersection between structure and agency, showing that there *is* room for organisations and the individual agents within them to negotiate different interests (as has happened with participatory development). Indeed it is in the engagement of individuals with discourse and discursive power that authority is continually constructed and re-constructed, and therefore maintained.

Foucault is perhaps the best known exponent of the connection between discourse and the exertion of power. Foucauldian discourse constructs assumptions of truth which are contained and developed through social, economic and political power.

*‘The role of this political power ... is perpetually to reinscribe this relation ... in social institutions, in economic inequalities, in language, in the bodies themselves of each and every one of us.’ (Foucault 1980, p. 90)*

Foucault’s analysis has a particular relevance for thinking about gender relations. Scott (1988) argues that ‘gender itself is a signifier of power’. Although gender is established as an objective set of relationships between biological men and women, the symbolic

and concrete organisation of life is constructed around pre-set notions of norms attributed to particular genders, which are socially sanctioned to the extent that these imply a distribution of power: 'gender becomes implicated in the conception and construction of power itself' (Scott 1988).

But it is not just the creation of discourse that is important. Discourse must be seen as 'true', and therefore that those who are assigned power on the basis of this discourse have a right to power – they are seen as naturally powerful. Foucault sees a direct relationship between power and truth:

*'We are subjected to the production of truth through power, and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.'* (Foucault 1980, p. 93)

Regimes of truth are 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and the specific effects of power attached to the true' (ibid. p.131). Foucault sees academic scientific disciplines as specific techniques of power that are created through the production of truth. But these are not so connected with the 'right' to power, but more with the 'normalisation' of their truth, meaning that the truth of scientific knowledge for example is seen as so normal that it becomes almost impossible to envisage knowledge without scientific methodology and the 'objective' experiment-led methods that are central to its authority (ibid. p.106).

The discourse of development can be seen as embodying 'truths', for example in the separation of the public and private spheres of individuals who are part of the development process. An issue for this thesis is then how organisations and the individuals associated with them negotiate this notion of 'truth', especially as the individuals concerned directly experience the overlap between their own public and private spheres. Therefore, in order for organisations to rethink gender relations they

also have to rethink the power relationship between the organisation and individual agents associated with it. Foucault's emphasis on the role of individuals in power relations is useful in this respect. He sees discourse as dynamic and constantly 'circulating' through individuals and their relationships with each other, and he goes further to suggest that individuals are an 'effect' of power:

*'[Power] is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth... not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power... In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.'* (Foucault 1980, p.98)

Thus in this thesis it is argued that individuals in organisations are bearers of the norms and practices that maintain institutions surrounding gender relations and in so doing locate themselves within a structure in which they can both accept and contest the distribution of power. The dynamic nature of power when looked at in these terms allows for shifting alliances and relationships, even within a particular individual, depending on the context with which s/he is engaging. Power then, does not just rest with the powerful. Foucault talks of 'subjugated knowledges' which consist of knowledge of and about struggle (ibid. p.83). Although here Foucault is talking of opposition to the positivistic, scientific models of knowledge that so dominated academic disciplines, this idea is echoed in feminist analysis of power and knowledge in development discourse (e.g. Kabeer 1994).

In this thesis then, power is understood as dynamic, and includes not only the exercise of power by the powerful, but also resistance to this power and the creation of alternative bases of power by those without formal power. Foucault sees that, 'power is relational and exists only in its exercise ... constituted in a network of social

relationships'. This relates to the need for alternative spaces in which power can be constructed (Rowlands 1997, p.12). Foucault's notion of power recognises what Rowlands and Kabeer characterise as power to/power over, but does not conceive of a set of individuals acting together as 'power with', which has been central to feminist understandings of power (ibid. p.13). Although 'power with' and 'power within' have mainly been used to analyse processes of negotiation by beneficiaries of development interventions, these distinctions can be applied to the agency of individuals working in development organisations to analyse their interaction with processes of organisational change. A volunteer, for example, will have a particular source of power because of 'truths' associated with volunteering, her/his own expertise, and her/his location in the social/political structures of her/his placement. These all have a bearing on how s/he is able to see, negotiate and challenge the rules, norms and practices, including those of gender relations, contained within the discourses of development and volunteering.

Therefore people working in development organisations are able to negotiate their own interests in the context of discursive power. This is demonstrated by the experience of feminist agents engaging with development organisations, resisting and contesting discourses of development by using their own inclusion in the industry. I now move on to examine the importance of this body of literature for this thesis.

### ***2.3.3 Gender relations and organisational change***

The idea that 'gender means doing things differently' expresses the notion that in order to address inequalities between men and women, development organisations need to examine how power is entrenched and reproduced at the level of individuals. 'Doing things differently' also refers to the need to transform the organisations themselves, and how gender relations are negotiated and formed within the organisation. This subsection draws on the work of Goetz (1997), Miller and Razavi (1998) and Rao, Stewart



and Kelleher (1999), to reflect on the role of gender relations within organisations, and the need to recognise and address them at the level of individual development practitioners.

A key proponent of the need to analyse gender relations within organisations, taking a critical perspective on institutions, is Goetz (1997). Goetz argues that organisations reflect institutionalised biases:

*'Organisations are formed within the environmental constraint represented by institutions, they create the concrete mechanisms through which formal and informal rules are applied, societies are regulated and co-ordinated, resources are distributed, and cultural systems are validated and reproduced'. (Goetz 1997, p. 8)*

However, Goetz suggests that in the process of reproducing gender differences, individuals in an organisation are engaging in a system of negotiation and agreement of norms and practices. Therefore organisations contain within them the element of agency – i.e. the actions, beliefs and assumptions of individuals (ibid. p. 15). Organisations and the individual agents working within them are a key arena, therefore, for the possible transformation of institutionalised gender discrimination and inequality in development.

Goetz presents what she terms a 'gendered archaeology of organisations' (ibid. p. 16), which looks at the institutional and organisational history: how the organisation divides people's lives between the public and private spheres, the importance of politics and the powerful role of women's movements, and the gendered subtext of ideas and discourse (ibid. p.17), including how organisational culture attributes values to 'male' and 'female' characteristics (ibid. pp.18-19). She suggests that how organisations reflect gendered norms and practices through these elements maintains male privilege and

men's power over women.

Furthermore, Goetz's analysis includes the study of how the institutionalised norms and practices of gender relations also affect the organisation of time and space for development agents. This includes issues such as the location of the organisation, childcare arrangements and working hours, travel requirements, etc (ibid. p. 20).

Goetz's (1997b) study of women workers in a Bangladeshi NGO examines the gendered dimensions of time and space for development workers. In this case there were so many constraints imposed on women in the private sphere that it undermined their ability to operate as 'effectively' as men in the organisation (Goetz 1997b). This thesis builds on Goetz' analysis by addressing the potential of development agents in bringing about *changes* in the norms and practices associated with gender relations. By taking this analysis further, this thesis will ask whether, by recognising the role of agents, an organisation might be able to engage with and respond to individual experiences of gender relations. An organisational process based on this kind of engagement would involve a more dynamic relationship between individual agents and the organisation (see Chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis).

While Goetz highlights the intensely political and conflictual nature of negotiating a more equal terrain for women in organisations (ibid. 23), other authors such as Miller and Razavi (1998) see engagement with development organisations as a feminist project of 'de-institutionalising male bias' (Miller and Razavi 1998, p. 2). The strategies they present are based on the idea of 'entryism' and transformation from within. Miller and Razavi describe these strategies as a new genre, in which feminists engage with development organisations not as monolithic and impermeable, but as legitimate and key areas of political struggle. This argument reflects the insights of feminist engagement with development organisations, drawing on the dynamic nature of

discursive power in order to contest and challenge dominant norms and practices. But it must be recognised that this route is also open to the dangers of the feminist agenda being co-opted into the current development discourse, if existing gendered power structures are not changed (ibid. p.10).

To address gender and power relations within organisations, this thesis also draws on the work of Rao, Stuart and Kelleher (1999). In a nuanced examination of how power and authority works within development organisations, they examine the power of dialogue and the role of voices, and the power of conflict, which balances confrontation and negotiation. They contrast understandings of power as finite and limited against their own understanding of power as empowering and infinite (Rao et al. 1999).

Authority thus exists in organisations both in terms of the power that can be exerted by some over others, and in terms of negotiation and resistance.

Rao et al. suggest that there exist 'substructures', which reflect existing institutionalised norms and practices surrounding gender relations, and are characterised as being built on a fundamental separation, and consequent devaluation, of 'life' from 'work'. This reflects the division between the public and private spheres that is at the centre of this thesis. Rao et al. argue that what they term the 'deep structure' of an organisation contains a 'collection of values, history, culture, and practices that form the unquestioned, 'normal' way of working in organisations' (ibid. p.2). Rao et al. also suggest therefore that change requires both a transformation of the rules, and 'a fundamental re-invention of organisations and institutions in line with a vision of gender and racial equality integrated with sustainable development' (ibid. p.3). Working with the 'deep structure' of organisations involves addressing:

the value attached to 'heroic individualism' and other male myths of identity that

silently exclude women;

the split between work and family, exclusionary power in organisations which reinforces gender discrimination, 'silences alternative perspectives' and blocks organisational learning;

'the monoculture of instrumentality' which 'confuses the accomplishment of project objectives with the wider issue of social change' (ibid. pp. 4-11).

The study of the 'deep structure' of organisations therefore represents how an institutional analysis of the norms and practices of gender relations can address the role of individuals in organisations, and the relationship between individuals and the organisation in processes of organisational change.

All these authors recognise the importance of institutional analysis in development organisations, and the need to engage at different levels to bring about change, but each has gaps which this thesis attempts to address. The focus of Rao et al.'s analysis is on the links between work practices and gender equality (ibid. p. 21). Their analysis of the agent is thus not explicitly linked to her/his full identity as a gendered individual, only to her/his work. Similarly Miller and Razavi limit their analysis to the role of change agents within organisations. Goetz addresses the overlap between people's public and private lives, but does not extend this to the engagement of an individual with the organisation. This thesis will take these analyses further, and argue that the gendered identity of development practitioners cuts across both their public and private lives, and that their engagement with both their work in development and their relationship with the development organisation is affected by their values, assumptions and behaviour in both of these spheres. As individuals, they embody gender interests that span both their public (organisational) life and their private life. Individual agents working in values-

based organisations such as development organisations, also form a connection between organisational and individual 'values'. This suggests a dynamic relationship, within which these values can be negotiated and changed through a process of organisational learning. In order to explore the role of values in more depth, I now turn to the subject of individual development agents working as volunteers.

## **2.4 Individual agents in development: conceptualising volunteers**

Volunteers are agents of development, and as such they represent the individual agents I examine in this thesis. Volunteers are only one sub-set of individuals in development, but I argue that they represent a 'revelatory' (Yin 1994) example of a group of development practitioners. The example of volunteers in this thesis is based on my case study of VSO, which itself is a 'revelatory case' (ibid.)<sup>19</sup>. By this I mean an example to which I had access that reveals key areas (such as values) which affect how individuals are able to engage with development organisations, and that illustrates some of the specific challenges and opportunities of rethinking gender relations contained within the 'deep structure' of development organisations.

Giles Mohan (2002) developed ideas of development through, by and of diaspora. I have adapted this idea to volunteers working in development to analyse their relationship with the organisations with which they are associated. At the first level, an organisation works 'through' volunteers to implement organisational development goals. Volunteers are the mechanism through which volunteer-sending development organisations work. At the second level, development is carried out 'by volunteers'. This relates to the work that a volunteer carries out during the period of the placement. And finally, there is development 'of volunteers'. This relates to a volunteer's

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<sup>19</sup> See Chapter 3 for a discussion of case study method as it is employed in this thesis.

engagement with the placement context, the relationships s/he forms, and her/his own learning during the placement period. The ideas of development through, by and of volunteers help to understand how the experience of volunteering operates at different levels. I will use these ideas later in the thesis to examine the engagement of VSO volunteers with development, and their relationship with VSO.

The analysis of the literature that follows focuses specifically on the values that inform volunteering for development, and the power relations in which volunteering is embedded. This analysis adds to the argument made in previous sections about the importance of norms and practices associated with development, gender relations, public and private, and the role of individuals as both bearers and negotiators of development discourse and practice. My examination of volunteering is limited to the context of development, and my focus on volunteers is therefore confined to their role as development agents<sup>20</sup>. My research has not set out to examine the voluntary sector as such, nor the broader idea of 'voluntarism', although my discussion is informed by that literature. Common elements between development and the broader voluntary sector (such as the values-based nature of organisations) are important when thinking about organisational learning and change, but the scope of this thesis does not include a full discussion of voluntary values or organisational change in the broader sector of voluntary organisations.

#### ***2.4.1 Volunteering for development***

In this sub-section I consider the idea of volunteering for development organisations. Most of the literature on volunteering in the context of development concentrates on the individual activity of volunteering rather than the organisational context (UNV 2001).

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<sup>20</sup> This is discussed as it specifically relates to VSO in Chapter 4

United Nations Volunteers' (UNV) typology of volunteering is an example. Although it points out that there are widespread differences between countries in their perceptions of volunteering (for example in some countries it might mean a lack of financial reward, and in others it might be a lack of coercion) it suggests five key elements<sup>21</sup>:

- *Reward: 'the volunteer should not be undertaking the activity primarily for financial gain, and that any financial reimbursement should be less than the value of the work provided'*
- *Free will: 'people's motivation to volunteer will perhaps always include a mix of reasons... But it would exclude any overt attempt ... to force people to participate'*
- *Nature of benefit: 'an identifiable beneficiary or group of beneficiaries (which might include ... the environment or society itself) other than (or in addition to) the volunteer's immediate family or friends'.*
- *Organisational setting 'both formal (organized) and informal (one-to-one) [settings] ... both in the public and corporate sectors'.*
- *Level of commitment: 'most volunteering would carry with it some degree of sustained commitment'.*

*(Adapted from UN Volunteers 2001, pp. 10-12)*

The UNV report suggests that volunteering is an individualistic activity. However, ideas of inclusion and social integration also feature in the UNV typology, suggesting that volunteering involves a relationship between the individual and the organisation or context s/he is working with, and that this relationship is central to the value of volunteering (UNV 2001, p.24). It is on this relationship that my analysis concentrates, and in the sub-sections that follow, I examine its particular nature for volunteers in

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<sup>21</sup> Volunteering should embrace all of these aspects, but may still look different in different contexts.

development.

The relationship between individual and context seems to have particular importance for expatriate volunteers working in development. An empirical study carried out by Watts (2002) argues that a key difference between expatriate volunteers and development professionals arises from the different relationships they have with the people and the context in which they are working. Expatriate volunteers are considered to have a more equal status with their colleagues and beneficiaries than expatriate development professionals, and this affects volunteers' idea of themselves and their motivation to do their job (Watts 2002). Even if they are often paid more than their local colleagues, volunteers do not benefit materially in the same way or to the same degree as most expatriate development professionals. Watts' study, which focused on VSO volunteers, argues that this willingness to forgo financial remuneration is at the core of what makes a volunteer:

*'Their salaries, low by expatriate standards, shape their expectations and help determine what motivates them to volunteer in the first place... They consistently expressed the opinion that maintaining a modest lifestyle by choice gave them a greater opportunity to realise their aims through integrating with the local community...' (Watts 2002, p.61)*

Watts' volunteers however reject the notion of 'altruism', often associated with volunteering. Contributing to a public good for some other motivation than financial remuneration is, however, apparent:

*'As a result of my perceived altruism, I'll do something for other people and hopefully I'll do something for [me] as well.'* ('Chris' quoted by Watts, p.62)

Clearly, volunteers' expectations go further than the 'jobs' they do (or they wouldn't



have felt the need to leave their 'home' professional contexts); nor are they the same as the expectations of development professionals (or they would demand the same levels of payment). For Watts, the lack of money mediates volunteers' relationships with local colleagues and communities, bringing a greater sense of 'belonging' or empathy – 'motivating factors that directly pertain to being a volunteer' (ibid. p.64). This puts relationships centre stage in an understanding of these volunteers. To continue my examination of volunteering in development, in I now look in more depth at the dynamics of these relationships.

#### ***2.4.2 Power relations in volunteering for development***

Choosing a lack of money can also be seen as a source of power for volunteers, and a form of 'giving' or philanthropy, which is predicated on maintaining unequal relationships of power between the giver and receiver (Anheier and Seibel 1990, Kendall and Knapp 1997, Marshall 1996, Billis and Harris 1996). Watts suggests that hierarchy and their own power both as individuals and as professionals are key concerns for volunteers. He points out that historically, volunteers in development have been characterised by youth and inexperience:

*'The concept of volunteer continues to be much abused and misunderstood in many countries where it is often equated with amateur, unpaid effort on a casual, charitable basis. Popular thinking about international volunteers frequently equates the concept with youthful idealism from rich countries, in the service of the poor in far-off societies' (Watts 2002, p. 60, quoting Dey and Westendorff 1996, p. 7).*

This has changed significantly over the years<sup>22</sup>, and now international volunteers,

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<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 4 for a description of these changes in VSO.

including those who work with VSO, are and consider themselves to be, qualified professionals. But the volunteers in Watts' research also seek to disassociate themselves from the negative image of the development professionals, where power and knowledge rest with the 'givers' or conquerors, often accompanied by 'big money, big houses, and big four-wheel drive vehicles' (ibid. p.64). Instead they emphasise how their identity as volunteers brings them closer to their local colleagues and community:

*'These volunteers feel that they can avoid these domineering attitudes through their close involvement with the local community' (ibid. p.62).*

Power and experience, or more precisely the perception of power and experience, are central and yet fraught with difficulty in the volunteer sense of identity and legitimacy.

*'[T]hose who work in development ...have power whether they like it or not. In such a context, those who possess power must also recognise that possession as legitimate. And it is here that VSOs experience difficulties as they seek parity with both [local] ...and expatriate colleagues' (ibid. p.65).*

Many of the volunteers interviewed by Watts cited their independence and ability to leave at any time as vital to their sense of power, but also to their sense of legitimacy – they stay because they want to stay. This makes their personal and professional power subject to their sense of underlying values, by which they perceive themselves as living and working.

Concerns such as hierarchical relationships, establishing a fair level of pay, and how to present and share professional expertise are not exclusive to volunteers. Many development agents (both expatriate and national) share these concerns and are in a similar situation to volunteers in their day-to-day work. This is partly because there is a common base of *values* to which both volunteers and development agents more

generally sign up.

Although values based on equality between those who give and receive may be part of the identity of development organisations (Lewis 1999), as Watts' study found, there are conceptual difficulties with this, particularly as it relates to the relationships between agents of development, partners and beneficiaries. The unequal power relationships in volunteering are inherent to the relationships themselves. The free will to give up power is itself a position of power, and the will to do the opposite may be invoked at any moment. This places the volunteers, and other agents of development, in a difficult position – claiming equality from a position of inherent superiority.

The complexity of the power relationships for volunteers has been mirrored by Kothari (2002) in her comparison of colonial administration and modern day development organisations. Kothari argues that the relationship between the modern development agent and the place/community is different from the historical relationship between colonial administrators and the place with which they were associated. Development organisations have made considerable efforts to distance themselves from the colonial era, and part of this deliberate attempt to disown colonialism has been the separation of individual people from the places in which they are intervening. Modern day development managers tend to value technical expertise – a specialist rather than generalist approach to practice (Kothari 2002, p. 20). Although this seems to depersonalise modern development interventions, Kothari points out that many of the same power 'signifiers' can be identified amongst modern consultants and other (particularly expatriate) development 'experts' working 'in the field' (ibid.) as existed in the colonial setting.

Thus the power relationships between development practitioners and the people to

whom their intervention is targeted has not significantly changed, only perhaps become less 'personal' and more 'technical'. But Kothari also notes that the personal is always there, with the embodiment of this relationship in the individual development agent. We can apply this argument to volunteers, where the relationship between the volunteer and the place in which they serve continues to be central to their values-based notion of volunteering, alongside their more 'technical' relationship. Thus volunteers and other agents of development are in a difficult and ambiguous position of power. But this position can also offer opportunities, and in the next sub-section I go on to explore how volunteers are in a position to exert their own individual power, and engage in a more dynamic relationship with the organisation(s) with which they are associated, in order to negotiate their own interests.

#### ***2.4.3 Accountability in volunteering for development***

Volunteers are the embodiment of the development organisations with which they are associated, and therefore represent the organisation's competence and trustworthiness, both to partners and beneficiaries, and to financial and legal stakeholders such as donors and trustees. The central importance of individual values to the volunteer identity makes their individual engagement with their context and their work a core part of their experience, and central to the notion of volunteer accountability. This thesis argues however, that volunteers present particular challenges for accountability. Watts (2002), in his study of VSO volunteers, identified a sense of independence that related to the importance of choice and free will in volunteering. This suggests that the notion of accountability in volunteering might be more complicated than sanction and control (as theorised by Leat 1990, 1996). However, this thesis also argues that the challenges for accountability presented by volunteers can be seen as opportunities through which to engage in a meaningful process of organisational learning and change.

There are different meanings of accountability and different reasons for thinking it important<sup>23</sup>. At least one understanding of accountability assumes the primacy of resources, in that those who give resources have the right to demand accountability and therefore the power to direct how those resources are used. However, Leat (1990) sees the claim to be accountable for a body of people served by an organisation as another perceived layer of accountability: the 'halo effect' of charitable status (ibid. p.63). This 'halo effect' seems to equate more to Leat's idea of legitimacy. There is, according to Leat, a danger of equating accountability and legitimacy (Leat 1990, p. 144).

Accountability for the purpose of gaining legitimacy may conflict with financial accountability in order to secure funds, for example, but ultimately both are necessary for organisational survival (ibid. p. 45).

Ideas of legitimacy and representation are also outlined by Edwards and Hulme (1995) and Fowler (1997), who emphasise the importance of 'downwards accountability' – or accountability to a body of people served by the organisation - for the legitimacy and ultimately the survival of development organisations. Fowler (1997), rather than seeing a danger in linking accountability with legitimacy, actually sees this link as necessary, where the organisation is able to demonstrate its achievements and gain a level of public trust and credibility (Fowler 1997, pp.180-183). This makes the claim of 'downward

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<sup>23</sup> Leat differentiates between three sorts of accountability: explanatory accountability, where an explanation of what is being done is required; accountability with sanctions means that there is some power to impose sanctions, either formally or informally. Responsive accountability requires the accounting partner to act in response to the recommendations of the partner demanding accountability (Leat 1990, p. 144). The power of stakeholders to demand accountability is often not just associated with their ability to impose sanctions on the organisation, but also their ability to make accountability meaningful by asking the right questions and assessing the adequacy of the answers. This privileges some groups over others (ibid. p.147).

accountability' to partners and beneficiaries more of an 'implicit and moral right, because they justify a [development organisation's] existence' (ibid. p.180). Fowler also makes a strong link between an organisation's ability to make itself accountable and the commitment of its managers and staff to common goals of eliminating injustice and deprivation of poor people. This level of commitment seems more identifiable in Southern development organisations whose centre of operations is closest to the people they purport to serve (ibid. p.181, p.59-60).

In the case of volunteers, they are the link between the organisation's centre of operations and the people it purports to serve. Volunteers are in a three-way relationship between themselves, the volunteer-sending organisation, and the host organisation with whom they carry out their day-to-day work. For the volunteer-sending organisation, volunteers are its presence and the way it carries out its work. For the host organisation a volunteer is the resource received from the volunteer-sending organisation. Volunteers are therefore key to the accountability of an organisation such as VSO – both upwards (for example accounting for resources received from government by giving an account of the impact of their work through host organisations and volunteers), and downwards (for example accounting for the purpose of gaining partner organisation cooperation and endorsement of VSO's existence by giving an account of the quality of volunteer placements).

Accountability of volunteers in the context of development is further complicated by questions of professionalism and accepted 'standards' of practice, seen in the context of a power relationship between the development organisation and the people in whose lives they are intervening. A development organisation has a wide range of stakeholders who could theoretically hold an organisation to account, but these stakeholders have widely varying abilities to actually demand that accountability. Stakeholders often seen

as ‘primary’ – the partners and beneficiaries of development organisations – are those with the least ability to demand accountability (Edwards and Hulme 1995, pp.9-10).

Thus, in the context of the downwards accountability of development organisations, analysts such as Fowler, and Edwards and Hulme, have highlighted the importance of values, and the importance of personal and direct relationships between agents of development, the organisations they are associated with, and their partners and beneficiaries. As discussed earlier, the volunteer identity is strongly related to their relationship with the local community and colleagues, which gives them a key role in bringing about this ‘downwards accountability’. But volunteering happens in a wider set of relationships, also involving different sorts of accountability to trustees, donors and public supporters, other development organisations, other divisions of the organisation itself, as well as other volunteers. In particular, volunteer-sending organisations are faced with the problem of how to enforce an idea of accountability within the notion of volunteering, when the whole idea of volunteering is predicated upon ideas of choice.

It is also possible however, to move away from the idea of accountability as enforced or imposed, and see the relationship between individual agents and organisations as a more dynamic one, in which interests and values can be negotiated. Thus the accountability of development agents becomes a pre-requisite for ‘institutional learning’ (Johnson and Wilson 2000a), and part of a larger collective process of institutionalisation of new norms and practices<sup>24</sup>. Understanding accountability as the construction of knowledge and practice out of accounts provided by development agents shows how organisational learning might be linked to individual agency, and acknowledges the relationship between a volunteer-sending organisation and its volunteers. This understanding suggests that that the relationship between a development organisation and individual

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<sup>24</sup> This framework of institutional learning is discussed further in Chapter 3.

development agents may offer potential for negotiating norms and practices associated with gender relations by engaging in such a shared learning process, based on accountability.

In the literature, organisational accountability appears only to relate to the public sphere of individual agents' work. From the point of view of gender relations however, I have been able to study how individuals' gender identities, their interests and values, make accountability an issue for both public and private spheres of their lives and their work, and are central to how they relate to both the development work they are involved in, and the organisations with which they are associated.

## **2.5 Individual agency and organisational learning**

The link between the individual and the collectivity of an organisation has relevance for bringing about processes of organisational learning and change, and particular relevance for bringing about changes in gender relations. As I have argued previously, an analysis of individual agency allows an examination of gender relations from the perspective of how individuals experience both public and private spheres of their lives. I have also argued that volunteers are motivated by values, which are personal values that also coincide with the value-based objectives of the organisation with which they are associated. Mackintosh (1992) has argued that the objectives of organisations concerned with 'public action' will coincide with the interests of their members<sup>25</sup>. This is distinguished from 'private action', which promotes one's own or other private individuals' benefit (Mackintosh 1992, p. 5). There is thus a link between how individuals experience gender relations, individual values and expectations, and

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<sup>25</sup> For Mackintosh this includes both organisations devoted to the public good, and organisations which are committed to actions to promote their own (and their members') interests (such as political parties).



collective (or organisational) values and expectations. Organisational learning and change, therefore, becomes less a process of setting objectives and expecting individuals to follow them in their professional day-to-day activities, and more a process of negotiating objectives with agents associated with the organisation, and ensuring that there is a continuing connection between the organisational and individual values represented by these objectives.

For an organisation to learn involves bringing about changes and improvements in its goals and how it arrives at them. This in turn involves changes in how the organisation carries out its work: doing things differently. In this thesis I consider learning a crucial link between an awareness of gender relations, and bringing about actual changes in values, norms and practices of an organisation. To encapsulate this transformatory dimension of learning involving changes in values, norms and practices, I use the term 'institutional learning'. My particular concern is institutional learning about gender, in which the transformatory dimension involves challenging values, norms and practices that work against gender equality. A critical examination of some aspects of organisational learning theory highlights some of the potential and the obstacles to institutional learning on gender relations in development organisations.

### ***2.5.1 Organisational learning: individual agency and power relations***

Those who write on learning in development organisations (for example, contributions to Lewis (ed.) 1999, Roper and Pettit 2003, and Roche 1998 and 1999) tend to build on ideas from key thinkers such as Argyris and Schön (1996) and Morgan (1997), although Roper and Pettit suggest that this literature is dominated by private sector management concerns, and generally contains a strong western-bias (2003, p. 5). It nevertheless contains some extremely useful insights, which I critically examine in this sub-section in relation to the challenge of changing individual and organisational values, norms and

practices which govern and reflect gender relations.

Argyris and Schön (1996, p.180) distinguish literature on organisational learning from that on learning organisations, with the former seen as more analytical and academic, and the latter more practical and prescriptive. I consider insights relevant to my research from both types of literature in this section, and some of the perceived limitations.

Organisational learning in order to change norms and practices of gender relations involves understanding how individuals relate not only to the learning process that is being undertaken, but also the power relations contained within the organisation itself and in the wider context in which both the individual and the organisation are operating. I will argue that this analysis is not adequately covered in either set of literature.

Argyris and Schön (1996) see individual, values-based learning as the ideal, promoting reflection on personal behaviour. Organisational learning then, can be seen as both a product and a process; it can be instrumental ('single loop') or it can change the underlying values ('double loop') (Argyris and Schön 1996). Argyris and Schön also widen the idea of learning to include 'triple loop' (or second order) learning, through which an organisation's [cap]ability to learn is enhanced, and values of learning embedded within the organisation (ibid. pp. 28-29). Argyris and Schön see organisational learning as a process carried out by a collective of people, but within an organisational environment in which learning is an organisational action, taking place according to various embedded norms and practices – which are both individual and organisational, and can also themselves be changed (ibid. pp.8-15). The organisational environment is crucial to the way in which an organisation is able to learn – this has both 'structural' (processes, procedures) and 'behavioural' (organisational culture)

aspects (ibid. p. 28).<sup>26</sup>

Organisational learning can also be negative (Argyris and Schön 1996, pp.18-19), such that the ends of the learning are in some way negative; or people may learn how *not* to learn, and inhibit the process of organisational learning in order to protect their own power and interests. Such negative learning is bound up with 'win/lose characteristics of organisational games of interests and power' (ibid. p. 29). Argyris and Schön state that their ideal model of learning may never be achieved – involving sharing power and control, resisting anti-learning strategies, and evaluating actions for the degree to which they help to generate new and useful information (ibid. pp. 117-119). But their study of case material gives them enough confidence to continue to modify and develop the model (ibid. p.250).

The overall approach to organisational learning provides a very useful model. However, from the perspective of this research, there are also some limitations. For example, although Argyris and Schön examine the realities of working with people in different organisational environments, the power relationships and inequalities that are often inherent and hidden within structures of the organisation are not fully explored. In the case studies that are used to explore their ideas of learning, there is no mention of the power inequalities between the participants. The ideas of 'defensive reasoning in individuals' (ibid. pp. 75-84) and 'inhibitory loops' (ibid. pp. 85-107) are presented without questioning the power structures within which the inter-personal relationships between the participants are located, and resistance to learning is presented purely in the context of their professional roles. Learning in this literature also does not seem to address the idea of gender relations or of the people in the learning process being

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<sup>26</sup> See also Ellerman 2003, pp.26-35, on the importance of behavioural and structural elements of organisational learning systems.

located in a wider context of power relations, both within and outside the organisation. Specifically Argyris and Schön do not deal with the inevitability of conflicts of interest based on social difference in any learning process designed to bring about change.

Morgan (1997) takes a different approach, using metaphors to analyse how organisations operate and learn. These metaphors are used to demonstrate different aspects of organisations, including organisations as brains, organisations as cultures, and organisations as political systems. The latter metaphors recognise the inevitability of conflict in organisational learning and change processes, and thus, in the context of this thesis, move beyond Argyris and Schön. In the light of insights from feminist literature, Morgan's cultures and counter-cultures might also address conflict based on gender relations, which is explored further below.

Whilst Morgan's initial analysis is of organisations as brains (*ibid.* p.73), he raises possible problems of organisations operating as bureaucracies, often in a way that obstructs learning processes (*ibid.* pp. 88-89), and he goes on to point out that this metaphor overlooks power and conflict. Argyris and Schön's view seems to resonate with the 'holographic brain' metaphor (*ibid.* p. 99), describing organisations as organisms, in which each constituent cell contains an image of the whole. However, some of Morgan's other metaphors, although not specifically presented as useful for organisational learning, provide insights on the issue of possible conflict in organisational change processes, such as the metaphor of cultures which are defined as 'a pattern of development reflected in a society's system of knowledge, ideology, values, laws and day-to-day ritual' (*ibid.* p.119). In this metaphor, Morgan sees organisations not as unified wholes (as metaphors of brains or organisms might suggest) but socially constructed units. Different interests will form different cultures and counter-cultures within an organisation (*ibid.* p. 138), and in many organisations there

exists a kind of sub-cultural warfare between groups and coalitions (ibid. p. 137).<sup>27</sup>

Organisational cultures therefore have underlying power structures, which can be and are used to control the actions of individual members. Although we can observe organisational culture, we can't always see all aspects. Underlying power structures are often hidden in daily norms and practices, and yet are important when studying the construction and negotiation of gender relations. Morgan points out that as organisations are socially constructed, organisational change also needs to be socially constructed (ibid. p. 151). However, people within organisations are also situated within a wider context of power relations outside of the organisation, and this requires a more nuanced approach to identifying blockages to change. Morgan's metaphor of organisations as political systems identifies the relationship between interests, conflict and power within an organisation, pin-pointing the way in which people manoeuvre to further their interests, not necessarily in the interest of the organisation as a whole. Here individuals are identified primarily as actors outside the organisational context, therefore relating to the organisation through other concerns and forming coalitions of interests both inside and outside the organisation. Morgan also points out that organisational conflicts are often institutionalised and therefore hidden. Thinking about organisations as political systems helps overcome the limitations of thinking of organisations as functionally integrated systems, and politicises human behaviour in organisations, uncovering power and sources of power within an organisation (ibid. p. 171). Although Argyris and Schön do identify political elements in organisational learning processes ('gamesmanship', etc.), these are categorised as 'anti-learning' and not specifically explored as an integral

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<sup>27</sup> This also relates to Argyris and Schön's analysis of the relationship between individual members and the organisation, through what they term individual and organisational 'theory-in-use'. However, they lack attention to the individual agents, and the relationships of power that exist between individual agents, both within and outside the organisation.

part of any learning or change process. However, Morgan gives us no suggestions of how to remove the blockages to organisational change. So there remains a gap in this section of the literature about how to bring about institutional change in organisations, particularly regarding changes in social relations, including gender relations.

Other literature, such as that on new institutionalism in organisational analysis, do give attention to the role of agency and power relations in bringing about institutional change in organisations (Powell and DiMaggio 1991, pp.28-30). But the analysis is limited to the organisational context, and even when change is attributed to external influences (ibid. p.30), the understanding of individuals and their interests is limited to their roles and identities within the organisation (ibid. p.31). Limiting people to their organisations excludes the behaviour and relationships of individual agents in the wider context of the society of which they are a part. This constrains understanding of the social relationships between individuals within the organisation, and perpetuates divisions between the public sphere of the organisation and the private sphere of an individual's life.

### ***2.5.2 Learning in development organisations: opportunities for rethinking gender relations***

Organisational learning has become central to the objectives of many development organisations (Korten 1984a and b, Korten 1990, Rondinelli 1993, Fowler 1995), and learning is seen as an integral part of a development organisation's relationship with the context in which it works (Roche 1999). Lewis and Wallace (2000) recognise that NGOs need to become learning organisations (ibid. p.xiii), but they observe that the context and goals of development organisations (for example the continued dominance of project funding, and the race 'to do' rather than reflect) constrain NGOs' learning abilities (ibid. p. xiv). Hulme and Edwards (1997) also recognise that NGOs continually

adapt their roots and their identities in an environment of shifting priorities; an environment led by donors and other powerful forces of the global capitalist market. Thus 'learning' can be seen as serving very different purposes. At one end of the spectrum are attempts by development organisations to change in response to an external funding environment. At the other end are organisational learning processes through which organisational values and objectives are negotiated between different stakeholders, including donors, staff, volunteers, partners and beneficiaries. This second view of organisational learning potentially represents a more transformational and conflictual process, and in this sub-section I suggest that it is at this end of the spectrum that successful learning to bring about greater gender equality in development organisations is to be found.

Development organisations have seen themselves as involved in a continuous process of investigation through implementation, often led by reflective practitioners, and attempting to create 'a culture of learning' (Fowler 1995, p.143). Authors such as Fowler see the engagement of stakeholders such as partners and beneficiaries as central to learning processes. If located within a process which recognises and deals with conflict, encounters between stakeholders with different attitudes, interests and influences can make a 'significant positive difference' to NGO functioning and help to create effective partnerships for learning (ibid. p. 153). However, when a learning process involves altering the norms and values of the NGO itself, this contains much more risk, and is seldom initiated from within the organisation itself (ibid. p. 195). The importance of arguments such as Fowler's for this thesis is that recognition of and addressing conflict might also apply to internal organisational learning processes, where an organisation is engaging with its agents of development, with whom the organisation has a relationship that involves power, but that is also based on the negotiation of individual and collective values.

Roper and Pettit have suggested that development organisations are attracted to ideas of learning which reflect the values base of development, such as emphasising respect for and inclusion of different people and ways of learning. Another value that emerges is that of embracing change, and challenging existing social and economic power structures that perpetuate poverty (Roper and Pettit 2003, pp.6-7). Although these values are normally associated with the work that a development organisation carries out, they are now often applied to the organisation itself, both in order to respond to a changing environment in which they are operating, and to focus on changing internal organisational structures. However, Roper and Pettit also note that such learning values generally stop short of advocating ‘internal democracy’, and they also do not address power inequalities that exist in the ‘deep structures’ of organisations<sup>28</sup> (ibid. p.8), a point that is made in the literature that I explored above (Section 2.3.3). Thus it can be concluded that the organisational learning literature reviewed here stops short of examining the importance of gendered norms and practices in governing these relationships.<sup>29</sup>

Organisational learning literature, because of its origins in the private sector, also often emphasises ‘competitive edge’ between different organisations. However, in order to respond to the environment presented by development, organisations have to be more interested in collaboration and cooperation (Roper and Pettit 2003, p.9). This suggests that organisational learning in development organisations involves some level of inter- and intra-organisational negotiation of shared values and interests. Organisational

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<sup>28</sup> Roper and Pettit use ‘deep structures’ (in the plural), referring to Kelleher (2003) in the same volume. In this thesis I have continued to use ‘deep structure’ (in the singular) as it is originally used by Rao, Stuart and Kelleher (1999).

<sup>29</sup> For example, childcare facilities might be advocated in the organisation, but there will be no pressure for a change in men’s participation in childcare responsibilities.



learning literature will also often assume some consensus or shared vision (from within a single organisation), but in the politicised and multi-actor context of development, where many different interests and values are present, Roper and Pettit argue that the negotiation of shared values and interests can be a more complicated process (ibid. p.10). This is particularly likely to be the case at the level of individual development agents, where their negotiation of a shared values base with the organisation with which they are working will reflect and reinforce their own individual values, which are located in the wider social and cultural context(s).

Thus conflict exists in processes of learning and change in the context of development, where practitioners are located as individuals in a social and political context (Rowlands 2003, p.3). The relationship between practitioner and the context in which they are working and learning is fundamentally shaped by who they are and where they are located in local or organisational hierarchies (Rowlands 2003, p.9). Another element not generally explored in the organisational learning literature, is that both within and beyond the organisation, the surrounding social context and learning are interlinked. This is vital for learning on gender to take place within an organisational context (Kelleher 2003, p.77). Individuals operate in any single organisational learning process as actors in multiple social contexts, in which they are located in relationships of power and influence, and exercise a degree of individual choice over how they interpret and implement lessons learned. Rowlands (2003) adds to this by pointing out that, in order for development agents to make changes in how others participate in gender relations, they also need support to make these changes in their own work and lives (Rowlands 2003, p.9). Plowman (2003) also recognises gender as one of the most fundamental and important areas for organisational change, because it affects every single individual (Plowman 2003, p.105). In order to address gender relations, Plowman sees analysis of gender power relations and control of resources in both internal (organisational) and

external (social and political) contexts as essential (ibid. p. 119).

Kelleher explains that in order to address gender through a learning process, an organisation must take on a commitment to transformation of power and gender relations (not just change within the existing structure of social relations), real political change (not just participation or a certain degree of democracy), and a commitment to key elements not normally addressed in learning literature, such as the more invisible symbols and images of gendered norms and practices. This involves institutional change, and draws on the lessons from the literature on gender and institutions (Kelleher 2003, pp.79-81).

Thus I return to the central element of institutions and the social relations of gender: how relationships of power are structured and entrenched in both public and private spheres. When people and organisations learn about gender, they are not just learning about a technical part of their work, or a set of political interests pursued within the organisational context, they are learning about something that is fundamental to their identity, and affects both their public and private lives. Because of the fundamental inequalities that exist in gender relations, successful learning must also include some degree of change, both personal and at the level of the 'deep structure' of the organisation. Tools, such as introducing a programme of gender training, are unlikely to bring about changes to the 'deep structure', and may contribute to the maintenance of the status quo (Porter and Smyth 1998). Development agents are also not simply recipients of information and new knowledge. They are active agents who negotiate their own meanings and understandings within an organisational context. However, a process of collective learning can potentially enable the expression and accommodation of social differences and contribute towards the establishment of inclusive norms, values and practices both within the organisation and for individual actors in their day-

to-day lives and work (Johnson and Wilson 2000a and b).

## **2.6 Conclusions to Chapter 2**

The analysis underpinning this thesis focuses on the role of the individual agent in organisational learning and change processes. Such an analysis provides insights into how the public and private spheres of every individual's life are linked, and how by recognising a more permeable boundary between the two, there is the potential for challenges to be made to the institutionalised norms and practices governing gender relations.

This thesis focuses on volunteers. Volunteers are a particular group of the larger group of development agents, who are the individual practitioners associated with development organisations. Each volunteer, as a man or a woman, has a gendered impact on and is affected by the context in which s/he is placed. The relationship that the volunteer has with the situation in which s/he is placed is not confined to her or his work: volunteers live within the community, sharing living conditions with colleagues and friends. Thus the placement context includes a volunteer's professional working day, *and* her/his private life at home or socialising within the community. As a volunteer a man or woman will enter into relationships at work and in the community, and the relationships s/he forms in that context will be mediated by her/his gender, as well as her/his race, class, age, and so on. As with all relationships, in her/his interactions a volunteer will be located in a structure of power, including discursive power. Recognising and challenging these power relationships and asserting individual values and beliefs is considered central to the volunteer role.

Volunteering in development is an investment that reinforces the social standing of the volunteer and her or his own personal sense of self, and ultimately contributes to the

objectives of the organisation. But the authoritative 'truth' (as theorised earlier in this chapter) contained within the 'deep structure' of development organisations prioritises activities in the public sphere and excludes gender interests associated with the private sphere. Thus the relationships a volunteer undertakes in her/his private life, although forming an important part of the volunteer experience and identity, are not included in the organisation's relationship with the volunteer.

However, the relationship between individual volunteers and the collective of the organisation is complicated because a development organisation's values are central to its identity and its public legitimacy, as well as central in the relationship between the organisation and individual volunteers working on its behalf. Recognition of a values base means the relationship between individuals and the organisation is more dynamic. This is because the values base is not just made up of organisational values, but also of the individual values of volunteers. Although altruism is rejected by modern volunteers, the notion of contributing to a common good is still very much alive in their understanding of volunteering, and as volunteers they are the personal embodiment of the organisational commitment, trusted to bring about the positive outcomes of the organisation's work, and a key element of organisational accountability. This gives volunteers' personal values an important role in their relationship with the organisation, and suggests that the division between work and life for volunteers might be more permeable. Thus potentially there is an opportunity for the negotiation of personal or private sphere interests.

The central role of individual and collective values, however, also suggests that conflict is an inevitable part of the relationship between individual volunteers and the organisation, and that recognising both the visible and hidden power relations in this relationship is essential for any process of organisational learning. By extension of the

connection between individuals and the collectivity, there is also a relationship between development organisations, individual volunteers, and the framework that underpins development practice. By volunteering in development, are people buying into this framework and thereby locating themselves within that power structure of knowledge?

The 'deep structure' of development organisations is gendered, containing assumptions about the division of roles and behaviours and power in public and private spheres which govern the institutional context in which volunteers live and work. However, I have argued that there exists a discursive and practical interaction between agency and structure. Thus elements of volunteering such as the importance of values to the volunteer identity, and the connection between personal values and the those of the organisation they are representing, as well as the importance of their relationship with the context in which they are working, in both their private and their public lives, might also enable volunteers to address the gendered nature of their role and relationships in development. By studying the relationship between VSO and volunteers I construct an analysis of individual agency, illuminate structures of power, and offer a conceptual space in which to think differently about gender relations in development. Such an analysis of gender relations sheds light on the role of people and inter-personal relationships in wider development practice. I suggest that processes of institutional learning on gender equality may have the potential to constitute a renegotiation of the boundaries between public and private spheres.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This research investigated a particular set of ‘problems’ associated with an organisation’s ability to address gender inequality, and the role of individual agency. The research therefore can be described as ‘problem-oriented research’ (Robson 1993, Mikkelsen 1995), where I built and maintained a collaborative relationship between myself as researcher and VSO, the organisation that I was investigating.

Underlying the research approach, research strategy, and methods, was a feminist epistemology (a theory of knowledge based on feminist values and principles). This epistemological basis to the research emphasised both my own (feminist) values, and recognised the values of the organisation and people who participated in the research. It also recognised the importance of political engagement, the political relevance of the research, and the social construction of knowledge that takes place throughout the research process. The negotiation of ‘truth’ therefore forms an important part of the research approach that I have used. (Oakley 2000, Fonow and Cook 1991, Katz 1992, Schrijvers 1995).

Building on this epistemological base, and particularly on the concern with the social construction of knowledge, has meant that the research was best served by taking a constructivist approach (Guba and Lincoln 1989). A constructivist approach (Guba and Lincoln 1989; Huttenen and Heikkinen 1998; Crawford et al. 2000) sustains both rigour and insight in a study of this kind by maintaining an emphasis on the quality of the relationship between the researcher and the organisation that is being investigated. Thus this research process paid particular attention to interactions with individuals, and ensured that multiple research methods were used in order to access as broad a spectrum

of individuals and perspectives as possible. Because of the centrality of dialogue, this kind of constructivist approach can be characterised as ‘dialogic research’ (Mohan and Wilson 2003).

In this chapter, I first discuss the methodological basis, and how the research was designed as a case study. I then describe the particular methods I have used and their relationship to the methodological base, and finally I address the challenges I have encountered in this research process.

### **3.2 Problem oriented research**

The problem that this research project set out to address was identified and negotiated between myself as the researcher and VSO as the organisation I was investigating. We sought to address how to institutionalise gender equality into VSO and its work in development. The problem was modified during the pilot stage of the field work, to focus on volunteers and volunteering in order to investigate the role of individual agency in the institutionalisation of gender equality. The research therefore addressed a ‘live’ issue within VSO at the time, and was developed throughout the project in collaboration with the organisation. This collaboration meant that throughout the research period, including the analysis and writing of the research results, I interacted with VSO as an organisation, and particularly with those who were most closely involved with the research, as participants, supervisors, or as people interested in the research for its relevance to their own work. This interaction took the form of telephone calls, emails and regular meetings, as well as the interviews, group discussions, and workshops, which were undertaken both for data collection and validation of results.

During my fieldwork period, VSO was engaged in a corporate strategic planning process, and the interaction of my research with the organisation was affected by this

coincidence. The main benefit for the research was that people were already thinking about the identity of the organisation, the relationship between development and volunteering, and identifying key challenges to their work. This meant that research participants already had well-formulated ideas that they were happy to discuss in the context of interviews or group discussions. I was also able to identify the strategic planning process as an organisational learning opportunity that I could investigate. Furthermore, the research process was also able to take advantage of organisational interest in questions such as gender equality, and undertake a validation process, to verify the findings with research respondents. There were two opportunities for this: a feedback workshop on May 8<sup>th</sup> 2002, and the presentation of my preliminary results to the International Senior Management Team (ISMT) on July 10<sup>th</sup> 2002.<sup>30</sup>

The point of contact between myself as researcher and the organisation was primarily through a project supervisor, who was a senior staff member in the overseas department of VSO in London. The role of VSO supervisor modified and evolved with the different stages of the research<sup>31</sup>. I had regular meetings with her/him throughout the project, as well as constant telephone and email contact. Initially the role was a conceptual one, inputting VSO perspectives into the design of the research and suggesting ways that the research could best be located within the organisation. This role also involved initiating research 'feedback sessions' during which other interested people could input their own perspectives and priorities. During the fieldwork phase of the research the role evolved to be that of 'gate-keeper' within VSO, providing inside information on appropriate informants and ensuring smooth access to all parts of the organisation. This part of the role also involved a significant degree of input into the initial analysis of results, and

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<sup>30</sup> These also presented opportunities for learning and interaction, which in turn led to VSO establishing a gender working group.

<sup>31</sup> The role has also involved three different people, due to staff turnover.



was particularly important in order to have a 'validation' phase, when results were fed back to research informants, and their perspectives sought on the initial analysis. The validation phase continued during the data analysis and writing stages of the research, with regular input from the VSO project supervisor to ensure accuracy in the representation of VSO, as well as identifying ways in which the research could continue to be relevant to VSO and used within the organisation.

Robson (1993) sees this kind of collaborative and 'live' issue research as 'real world' research, a term which can incorporate different levels of collaboration (Robson 1993, pp. 14-16). It is empirical research, investigating people, their relationships to each other, and their relationships with organisations as they experience them (or shortly thereafter) (Robson 1993, p. 60; Guba and Lincoln 1985, pp. 39-45). Because of the close collaborative relationship with VSO, and emphasis on addressing identified problems, the research had the flexibility to respond to initial results, and to negotiate concerns raised by respondents during the data collection and analysis period. However, as well as this 'live' focus, the research also had to allow a broader investigation, using different methods, with different sets of VSO staff and volunteers, in order to gain further knowledge and insight into the gender relations of individual agents in development. This meant that the generalisability – or validity of the research to other organisational contexts - was a primary methodological concern, as well as the trustworthiness of a problem-oriented, empirical enquiry such as this one (Robson 1993, pp. 66-75). This concern will be discussed in the sections that follow.

### **3.3 Feminist epistemology**

The epistemological base of this study is feminist, based on my own intellectual grounding and values as a feminist researcher. Oakley (2000, p.21) contends that to do

feminist research is more a statement of values than a statement of a particular set of methods that will be used. As a piece of feminist research, therefore, the most important element is that the research methodology is grounded in principles of gender analysis, which 'maps how gender, women and knowledge have been constructed both inside and outside all forms of science' (ibid. p.4), and recognises that research processes are gendered. This, according to Oakley, is more central to the 'democratization of ways of knowing' (ibid. p.21) than advocating particular methods:

*'neither methods nor methodology can be understood except in the context of gendered social relations.'* (Oakley 2000, p.4, original emphasis)

Fonow and Cook (1991) assert in their examination of feminist epistemology and methodology, that there exists a need for feminist research to provide a particular insight into the underlying structures of gender inequality (Fonow and Cook 1991, p.1). Thus in carrying out feminist research there is a concern both with how knowledge is constructed and with the political economy of gender relations, which implies a particular methodology.

In order to define feminist methodology, Fonow and Cook see four particular dimensions:

- i. reflexivity and attention to the research as a process in itself;*
- ii. an action orientation to the research process and results;*
- iii. attention to the affective components of the research and breaking through the wall of non-involvement;*
- iv. use of the situation at hand.*

*(adapted from Fonow and Cook 1991, p.2)*

These dimensions were useful to this research project, but they are not exclusive to feminist methodology. Similar principles emerge from participatory and action research methodologies (Reason 1994), and although this was not a participatory or an action research project, these principles were important in guiding the practical relationship between VSO and the project. Thus the importance of relationships was emphasised, ensuring the 'researched' had a voice through continuous feedback and dialogue with VSO, and facilitating VSO's use of the research process and the results.

The approach I took therefore, ensured that there was constant '... attention to the research process', as outlined in Fonow and Cook's dimensions (above), and to the relationship between the research and the organisation. This also ensured the '... action-orientation' of Fonow and Cook's dimensions in the research process. My relationship with respondents, the methods I used, and the negotiation that took place throughout the project meant that the research process broke through the '... wall of non-involvement', and I was able to be flexible and respond to the '... situation at hand'. Other important elements of feminist research for this project, which arose from a gender analysis informed by feminist values, were consciousness raising or empowerment within a research process, research as a mutual process for informant and researcher, and an appreciation of the role of the 'outsider within' (ibid. pp.3-4).

The role of 'outsider within' was central to the nature of the collaboration between myself as the researcher and the research participants. The values underlying this research are not just my own feminist values, but also had to take into account the values of the researched. As I will explain in more depth in the chapters that follow, VSO is an organisation which sees its identity and the identity of its volunteers as

grounded in a set of values associated with the activity of volunteering. In many respects my own values and those of the organisation and research participants coincided (around issues such as injustice and inequality, for example), and these shared values were crucial in establishing my relationship. Although I was an outsider in that I was not and had not previously been a volunteer, and nor was I a part of VSO as an organisation, I was regarded as sympathetic, and as someone with an insight into the organisational context. Thus with my own background working with development organisations I had an awareness of the 'inside', and my identity emerged as an 'outside' expert on gender issues, sympathetic to volunteer and organisational values. With this identity I found that I was able to relate successfully to research participants, and was a possible route to channel their concerns about gender equality and volunteering.

Acknowledging a values-base to research also acknowledges the subjectivity of the research process. Examining my own engagement has been a central part of claiming to carry out feminist research (Katz 1992). My own background as a feminist means that adopting a feminist epistemology has partly been about acknowledging my own assumptions and the belief system I bring as a feminist social researcher with a background in gender and development. My interest here has been to examine the issue of gender equality in volunteering and development, making connections between gender relations and public and private spheres. The primary focus has been on individual staff and volunteers of VSO, rather than on the organisation's partners and beneficiaries, which means that I have been analysing VSO staff and volunteers as active and gendered agents in the development process. However, like other social relations, those who are subject to them are likely to be sensitive to their examination. In this case, because I was dealing with the relationships between men and women, interviews and discussions on the subject might have appeared intrusive to the

individuals concerned. It was a methodological challenge therefore in this research to acknowledge and pursue this focus on the personal elements of volunteering and development, whilst avoiding alienating the people who engaged with this research. Meeting such a challenge involved some degree of external observation and analysis.

Adopting a feminist epistemology does not reject external observation, although it is important to acknowledge the arguments that only those experiencing their own reality can understand their situation, as set out in what is known as standpoint theory (see for example, Harding 1986), on which I have also drawn. Authors such as Narayan (1989) however, point out that using standpoint theory in feminist research can assume a universal women's or feminist viewpoint. Furthermore, whilst positivism is seen by some as a bastion of male-dominated knowledge and power in western contexts (Narayan 1989, p. 260), many traditional and religious frameworks of knowledge may also make claims to objective truth, and contain oppressive structures for women (ibid. p.260). Narayan asserts that the epistemic privilege of oppressed groups should not be 'reified into a metaphysics that serves as a substitute for concrete social analysis' (ibid. p.268). Thus there is room for some external observation in feminist research.

Hammersley (N.D.) also criticises the idea of epistemic privilege, but argues more fundamentally that the problem of standpoint is whether there are people with unitary perspectives at all, or whether perspective itself is more complicated, and perhaps more contradictory than that (Hammersley N.D., p. 4).

Ideas about epistemic privilege and standpoint are still useful, because they help to understand that an appreciation of different, situated knowledges is possible and desirable in a research project such as this. My analysis has used some principles of standpoint theory to document not only what is seen as the dominant knowledge within the context of this research, but also how knowledge is constructed, contested and

transformed by individual agents. However, I have sought not to simplify or falsely homogenise respondents, and I have acknowledged the inconsistencies that have emerged.

Furthermore, feminists have interrogated the idea of power in a research situation. Many feminist researchers have grappled with the practical and ethical problems of doing research with/on/by women, and as part of the process have examined the relationship that has developed between researcher and researched (Oakley 2000, p.16). Feminist researchers have challenged the idea of 'extracting' information from research informants, and sought a more reciprocal relationship between researcher and research participants<sup>32</sup> (ibid.). Whether or not this has been successful is a question within the feminist research community, as reflected by many post-feminist authors such as Mohanty (1991) who criticise the dominance of western feminist thought in feminist research. In this research project I have responded to, and sought to represent, a full range of views when investigating gender relations. It has not been a process of 'finding out' about an 'objective' reality; rather a process of negotiating reality from a variety of perspectives.

This has inevitably involved my own participation, particularly when seeking out views (such as those of feminist volunteers or staff members) that might have otherwise been excluded. This might be seen, by some readers, as 'taking sides'; attracting accusations of bias. However, as a feminist researcher, I have struggled to understand the power dynamics of the research, and the representation of those who participate, asking questions such as whose voices are heard? and who is the research for? (Schrijvers 1995, p.21). Taking sides, and acknowledging research to be political, demands of the

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<sup>32</sup> That this reciprocal relationship should be a goal of research is also a feature of other methodologies such as participatory research and action research.

researcher that s/he be 'critically conscious', and that the research engage in dialogue with both (all) sides of the debate, which then creates a kind of distance between the researcher and the situation being researched:

*'Conscious partiality' may open the way for a socially situated, contextualized knowledge which is more explicitly inter-subjective and dynamic; the result of unique, time- and place- specific dialogues which continuously raise new questions and images of reality in a dialectical way.'* (Schrijvers 1995, p.22, original emphasis)

Feminist values and principles have been instrumental in establishing an equal and collaborative relationship with both the organisation and the individual research participants. This relationship has enabled the use of methods such as 'member checks', 'thick data', and 'meaning in context', and is therefore central to the research validity or trustworthiness (Oakley 2000, pp. 62-66). But I have not sought one reality or 'truth': I have understood knowledge as constructed and negotiated, and different subjectivities as providing different, situated knowledges (Schrijvers 1995, p.23).

### **3.4 Dialogue and the constructivist approach to research**

The negotiation of knowledge in this research means that the findings are not seen as facts but as *meanings* created through a process that includes the researcher, and that will make up a picture of multiple realities, none of which are 'true' in the positivist sense, but all of which are part of the construction of meaning. This constructivist approach also involves studying the relationship between context and meaning and the different value positions adopted by stakeholders in the process (Guba and Lincoln 1989 pp. 8-9).

In order to ensure its reliability, research taking this approach must meet criteria such as 'credibility' (through participation of research informants), and 'transferability' (ensuring a clear and transparent research process with acknowledgement and documentation of the context, so that others can judge the process). In order to achieve this kind of collaborative research relationship, negotiation and dialogue are key (ibid.). As dialogue is central, such a constructivist approach can also be characterised as 'dialogic' (Mohan and Wilson 2003).

Others such as Crawford et al. (2000), who have carried out research within the constructivist paradigm (Crawford et al. 2000, para.17), established the rigour of their research through validation, documentation and explicit reporting.<sup>33</sup> They describe the credibility of their research as

*'establishing a match between the constructed realities of respondents and those realities as represented by the evaluator and attributed to various stakeholders'*  
(ibid. para.20)

This is achieved through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer de-briefing and member checks (ibid. paras.20-21). The collaborative relationship between myself and VSO as described above, including the validation process, can likewise be characterised as prolonged engagement and observation, and the collaboration included peer de-briefing (through contact with research supervisors and other interested people) and member checks (engaging in dialogue with research participants, so that my interpretation of their perspective is checked back with them). Thus the relationship contributed to the validity and credibility of the research. The generalisability of the research has been achieved through 'thick description' (or thick data) to provide 'as full

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<sup>33</sup> These can also be seen as criteria for rigorous qualitative research more generally.



a database as possible in order to facilitate transferability of judgements on the part of others' (ibid. para.22). Through my description of VSO as an organisation (see Chapter 4), and the case study material (see Chapters 5-7) and the data collection methods (see following Sections, and Appendices) I have provided 'as full a database as possible' (ibid. para. 22). The dependability of research is 'concerned with the stability of the data over time' (ibid. para.24), and this has been achieved through constant contact with research participants through workshops, meetings, and personal contact. Finally, the confirmability of research is based on the 'need to show that data, interpretations and outcome of inquiries are rooted in contexts and persons apart from the evaluator and are not simply figments of the evaluator's imagination' (ibid. para.25). This was achieved through having a 'validation phase' where any individual bias could be challenged and removed, and where an interpretation of data was negotiated and constructed between multiple parties representing the different areas of the organisation.

A further element of the approach to the research has been to seek out conflicting view points and use multiple sources of data (as well as multiple methods of data collection) in order to triangulate and cross-check results, and to reach as many different participants as possible.<sup>34</sup> This kind of pluralism is key to a rigorous constructivist approach in qualitative research (Oakley 2000, p.67) and is similar to Dick's (1999) 'maximum diversity sample' (ibid. p.4) of participants and a depth of involvement of participants (stakeholders). This can give an even wider sample of data than random sampling, and increases the diversity of information and understanding (ibid. p.4). As such, a maximum diversity sample, and stakeholder involvement can be viewed as methods of triangulation. Dick also explicitly adds a dialogic element, describing the importance of 'quality of dialogue' through testing agreements, explaining

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<sup>34</sup> The collection of data and its documentation in this research process is explained fully in Section 6 of this chapter.

disagreements, and uncovering and challenging assumptions (ibid. pp.5-6).

Dick's criteria for rigour have been achieved in this research by ensuring the engagement of research participants from across the organisation, and of those with divergent viewpoints, and by ensuring a commitment to responsiveness in the research 'driven by the data, by the situation, by the people' (ibid. p.7). My own background in development and the location of the VSO supervisors for this research in the overseas division of VSO, meant that a necessary part of the dialogue in this project was to negotiate sympathies with other departments of VSO, including recruitment and training, global education and advocacy, and also pre-departure, serving, and returned volunteers. My own identity as a sympathetic outsider, the critical line taken in my research towards ideas of development, and my genuine interest in volunteering, helped to locate the research closer to VSO staff and volunteers who are more focused on the volunteering side of VSO, and therefore might have felt excluded from research focused on development issues. On the other hand, during the first part of my fieldwork based in the Philippines, I was perceived as someone with a background in development, and therefore sympathetic to their concerns for VSO to become 'more developmental'. Both of these positions were genuine, and my research benefited from the generous and genuine participation of VSO staff and volunteers from all perspectives.

Dialogue and negotiation have thus played a central part in my study. The success of this approach is demonstrated by the fact that the research was able to respond effectively to both my own concerns and those of the respondents with whom I interacted at the beginning of the study. I began by looking at the intra-organisational learning processes of the VSO-Philippines country programme following their first separately funded gender programme (Integrated Skills for Women In Development, or ISWID). However, during this initial phase of the research I had contact with volunteers

and staff working in the Philippines, and my attention was drawn by some respondents to what appeared to be more fundamental issues about how gender equality was understood in the context in which they were operating. As individuals, volunteers are gendered beings and can engage with their context on different levels and in different ways, with both positive and negative impact. It was at this point that I was able to use the feminist analysis that already formed the epistemological basis to the research to re-focus on the idea of individual volunteers, and their gendered relationships with VSO and their host context, in both public and private spheres. This focus was discussed and negotiated with VSO both before and during the remainder of the research process, culminating in the May 8<sup>th</sup> 2002 feedback workshop, where participants were asked to respond to the preliminary results that I presented. The validity and generalisability of the research have thus benefited from the quality of the relationship between the research project and VSO.

### **3.5 Case Study research**

I have used VSO as a case study as it presented the most appropriate strategy through which to look 'inside' the units of analysis (VSO), and understand their inner workings (Thomas 1998, p. 309). It also allowed the constructivist dialogic approach to emerge. Instead of proving or disproving particular detached hypotheses, case studies work through a process of developing labels for classification, and unravelling causation (Langrish 1993, pp. 5-6). In other words, case studies enable the negotiation of meaning. Case studies also provide the opportunity to reflect different perspectives of the research participants (Hammersley N.D., p. 3), and to represent people's individual 'stories'. This maintains the resonance of the social reality of the research (ibid. p. 3), which adds to its authenticity, and 'captures the unique character of the research situation' (ibid. p. 4). When following a constructivist approach, case studies allow this

by emphasising the importance of rich data, and locating the research in its own context.

Yin defines case study as:

*'An empirical inquiry that i) investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its real life context, especially when ii) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.'* (Yin 1994, p. 13)

In this research the focus has been on social relations in a real life context, where case study strategy has helped to reveal relationships that are not subject to quantitative analysis. A further benefit of case study has been that

*'It has the ability to deal fully with an array of evidence: documents, artefacts, interviews, and observation. (ibid. p. 8).*

Although case studies have been criticised for the risk of bias, Yin points out that problems of bias occur in all research strategies. Although I fully concur with Yin in this defence, I have also acknowledged earlier my engagement with the research, and pointed out the benefits of this 'critical consciousness' (Schrijvers 1995). Another criticism is the problem of generalisation in case studies. But Yin compares some case studies to experiments, which are generalisable to theoretical propositions, rather than to universals – i.e. analytical generalisation rather than the statistical generalisation of surveys, which is based on frequency (see also Thomas 1998).

There are different types of case study. In my research, the main case study unit of VSO relates to Yin's classification of a 'revelatory case' (Yin 1994, pp.40-41) of a body of organisations – volunteer-sending development organisations. In this case, 'revelatory' can apply to VSO as a good example of a volunteer-sending development organisation, revealing important characteristics, and one to which I had access. Within the wider

body of development organisations, VSO can also be seen as a 'critical case' (ibid. p.38) which, because of its character as a volunteer-sending organisation, highlights the relationship between agents of development and the organisations and communities with which they are associated. John Langrish (1993) suggests similar ideas with 'the case next door' (i.e. with good accessibility) and the 'cor look at that' case (Yin's critical case). In this research I refer to VSO as a 'revelatory case'.

In this study, there were two inter-connected levels on which case study was carried out:

- VSO as an international development organisation that has provided the overall context for agency and has provided opportunities to study volunteers as a particular set of development agents.
- A case study of the VSO Philippines country programme because it was regarded by VSO as an exceptional programme office on issues of gender, having had the experience of the ISWID programme and since then continued to work on gender issues through placements.

According to Yin's classification, case study strategy as I have used it in this project, is explanatory: asking 'how' questions, relying on multiple sources of evidence (interviews, observation, informal group discussion and documentation) and using multiple perspectives (VSO staff in the UK and the Philippines, VSO-Philippines partners, pre-departure, serving and returned volunteers) (ibid. p. 13). These sources and perspectives converge on a central theoretical proposition, bound up in the research questions, which have guided the collection and analysis of data.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For Thomas (1998), choosing case studies is 'exploratory', which relates to Langrish's ideas of classification and looking for the underlying principles of taxonomy. This emphasises the challenging

Research questions are important in case study research strategy because they help to identify 'what the case is' (ibid. p. 21). In other words, within the case study strategy, it must be clear what kind of case study it is, what are the units of analysis (both main and embedded), and what constitutes the context. The main focus of my research was represented by a primary research question, which is the question addressed by the overall thesis. I have then developed sub-questions, which identify key points or areas of investigation within the research focus, and which were covered in the research in order to seek answers to the main question:

- How can gender equality be negotiated through organisational learning leading to institutional change processes in the context of volunteering in development?
  - How is gender equality understood in the context of volunteering in development?
  - How is knowledge and understanding of gender equality negotiated in the relationship between VSO and volunteers?
  - What is the potential for organisational learning with respect to gender equality and change processes to be integrated into normal practice?

For this research project, a clear theoretical perspective has been key to a successful case study strategy (ibid. p. 27). In Chapter 2 I outlined this in full. The theoretical basis of the thesis enabled me to form a hypothesis: *the 'deep structure'*<sup>36</sup> *of VSO as a*

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nature of case studies (Thomas 1998, p. 319): if they are to be challenging they must be chosen to relate to the ideas behind the theoretical proposition. However, this process is long as it requires that the researcher look for as many different types of case as possible, in order to challenge or support the theoretical proposition (ibid. p. 320).

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter two for a discussion of the term 'deep structure', defined as the 'collection of values, history, culture, and practices that form the unquestioned, 'normal' way of working in organisations' (Rao

*development organisation constrains the institutionalisation of gender equality into volunteering in the context of development*; and by taking a constructivist, dialogic approach I was able to challenge and modify this hypothesis as the research progressed.

Thomas (1998) emphasises the importance of being as open as possible to reconceptualisation, and employing the same methods to achieve rigour as in semi-structured interviews (i.e. through documentation, triangulation, and using several sources for evidence), and using 'more than one handle' (i.e. having two contrasting sides of the theoretical proposition to see which – if either - has most explanatory value, and which – if either - needs modifying) (ibid. p. 330). Originally my own assumptions were that ideas of gender could most usefully be studied at the level of the organisation and its development programmes, but (as has already been explained) my assumptions were modified in response to initial research results to a focus on individuals. This modification did not change the case study or research questions, but it changed the focus of some of the data I looked for in relation to the research questions and how I later interrogated the data in relation to my hypothesis, which I recast as follows:

*'the 'deep structure' of VSO as a development organisation constrains the institutionalisation of gender equality into volunteering in the context of development by maintaining boundaries between the public and private spheres. But agents can transcend the deep structure through negotiated learning.'*<sup>37</sup>

A case study must also have 'construct validity' (does the study address the problem?), (Robson 1993, pp. 66-70)<sup>38</sup>. Yin too emphasises that within the design of the case study

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et al. 1999, p.2). I continue to use the term 'deep structure' in this thesis, referring to this definition.

<sup>37</sup> These ideas, their theoretical bases, and their relevance to the research have been discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>38</sup> As well as internal validity (do the results prove the hypothesis), and external validity

it is important to address the validity of the case study construction, including clear propositions and units of analysis (Yin 1994, p.33). The proposition – the hypothesis – deduces where in the study to look for answers to the questions, which in this case have been VSO staff in London (Overseas Division, and those involved in volunteer recruitment and sending), pre-departure and returned volunteers, and VSO-Philippines staff and volunteers. The units of analysis follow the propositions, which in this case are the overall picture of VSO as a development organisation, and the particular experiences of staff and volunteers in the Philippines. When choosing these propositions and units of analysis, there were also practical considerations of availability and access to data.

The VSO-Philippines office was chosen as an accessible sub-unit of analysis, and one which provided an ‘exceptional’ example of VSO’s work on gender. For this reason it cannot be taken as representative of other country programme offices. According to Thomas (1998), representative samples are inappropriate in case studies, and units of analysis should be illustrative of key aspects of the proposition, and present challenges to the proposition. VSO-Philippines therefore provided an illustrative example, and I used multiple sources and methods to find different ways of looking at the research question, constructing an overall picture of VSO, and a more particular picture of the Philippines country programme. Multiple methods also allowed me to access different kinds of information (e.g. the group discussions, using scenarios, gave more information on the relationship between public and private spheres in volunteering than interviews did). I also attempted to balance the perspectives of VSO, by using the voices of feminist volunteers. In this way I looked for diverse perspectives on the questions, and in the process of the research I challenged not only the perspectives of respondents, but

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(generalisability), both of which have been addressed in my previous sections on dialogic research.



also my own.

The table below illustrates the unit and sub-unit of analysis in this study, and how they provided different perspectives on the research questions and research hypothesis.

***Table 1: Units of Analysis***

<b><i>Unit of Analysis</i></b>	<b><i>Perspectives on the research questions</i></b>
Main Unit: Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)	Overseas division, Senior Management Team members, Recruitment and Training divisions, Global education and Advocacy, Volunteers (pre-departure and returned)
Sub-Unit: VSO-Philippines Programme – an example of a country programme with experience on gender issues.	VSO-Philippines staff, serving and returned volunteers, feminist volunteers, members of the Filipino women’s movement.

### **3.6 Methods**

Constructivist approaches and case study research suggest particular kinds of methods that enable engagement with informants. In this case the engagement was not just with individuals, but also with groups of volunteers and VSO staff members. Interviewees and groups (see Appendices 1 and 2 for list of interviewees and group participants) were selected for the breadth of their perspectives: to represent the different levels of hierarchy and the different departments of the organisation. Semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 3 for outline of questions) enabled me to investigate the particular focus of the research across all the interviews, whilst giving as much freedom as possible for unexpected responses or responses that went further than the immediate questions. I

also used the same approach by email, with serving volunteers in the Philippines. This enabled them to see and understand the structure and the point of the interview, but to respond in their own way and their own words. In seeking consent from interviewees and group discussion participants, I guaranteed their anonymity. As many participants in this research can also be identified easily by their role, I have labeled respondents by codes, and identified them in Appendix 1 by using a pseudonym and quoting their division. I use their division to locate them (or if they are in the Senior Management Team, this has been indicated) because it indicates (broadly) what kind of relationship they are likely to have with volunteers. Group discussion participants are identified by the group, as these were made up of people who had broadly similar roles (returned volunteers, senior managers in the overseas division, placement advisors who have contact with volunteers pre-departure, and regional support officers who have contact with volunteers immediately prior to their return to the UK). A full list of interviewees and group discussion participants with details of their roles is also provided in Appendix 2, in alphabetical order.

Group discussions were semi-structured around particular vignettes or scenarios (see Appendix 4), which enabled the participants to focus on particular issues, but the discussion was free-ranging and allowed me to observe the group as it negotiated responses to the scenarios. I also carried out some participant observation at pre-departure volunteer training weekends and at a returned volunteer weekend. This allowed informal engagement with participants, an engagement which in itself was a source of much 'rich data'.

The survey of employer organisations in the Philippines (see Appendix 5 for full survey) was a more formal and structured approach, designed to give an outline of employer organisations' perspectives on the issues. It was designed for busy people,

requiring very little input of time to complete, and therefore produced a good response rate.

Finally, the workshop and the International Senior Management Team (ISMT) meeting enabled me to feed back and discuss my results, providing the opportunity for further dialogue and negotiation of meaning in the research.

As stated above, the Philippines country programme provided insight into a gender programme, and particular follow-ups emerged for the research to continue to pursue. The substantive research then followed the relationship between the two strands (VSO-Philippines and VSO-UK). Thus there emerged a dialectical character to the research: in the interviews and discussions, between two different strands of the research, and between the research and VSO.

I have only been able to include a part of the data in the thesis analysis, but the data I gained from different sources allowed me to triangulate results. The multiple sources also provided insights into the conflicts and challenges that emerge in an organisation such as VSO. Each of the data collection methods was documented through notes, transcription, or reports written immediately afterwards. This documentation included not only the results of the actual data, but also my own (subjective) impressions of the dynamics and the relationships involved. In order to organise such a pluralistic study, and ensure that the use of multiple methods remained focused, I used the same broad framework for all interviews and workshops that allowed me to explore the different elements of institutionalisation.

### ***3.6.1 The 3As: a framework for data collection***

I needed a framework for investigation that would relate to the key elements of my hypothesis, a framework that would therefore enable me to:

- Uncover the deep structure in VSO and its embodiment in institutional meanings and values expressed by its agents (employees and volunteers) in relation to gender equality
- Explore the opportunities for, and constraints on, these agents to bring about change through individual and organisational learning.

I adapted a framework developed by Johnson and Wilson (1997) to set agendas for learning and action, and which built on ideas that were concerned with improving NGO performance (Edwards and Hulme 1992, 1995; Fowler 1997). This framework brings together key aspects of agency in development management that, in multiple stakeholder settings, need to be negotiated to enable effective action. The cornerstones of the framework are: uncovering the *assumptions* that lie behind perspectives on action, identifying how individual and organisational agents can be held to *account* for their actions, and how one might collectively *attribute* impacts to actions. Taken together, they were labelled by Johnson and Wilson (ibid.) as the ‘3As’ framework of assumptions, accountability and attribution.

In adapting this framework for my research, I considered these cornerstones as also being fundamental to negotiating institutional change among stakeholders in a single organisation. With respect to the key elements of my hypothesis above, finding out about:

- Assumptions on gender equality held by different agents in VSO would enable me assess the extent to which embedded meanings are related to the deep structure associated with development and volunteering
- Accountability would enable me to assess the management of agency within

VSO – especially the complex issues of holding agents to account with respect to their actions in the context of gender relations

- Attribution would enable me to assess the process within VSO of interpretation of results of actions by agents.

Thus, finding out about assumptions would relate to the first key element of my hypothesis above, accountability and attribution, especially as they relate to learning, more to the second element. They therefore framed my investigation across the range of methods that I used.

### **3.6.2 Data collection**

#### **Pilot study in VSO-Philippines:**

This pilot study consisted of interviews with five members of staff (all existing programme staff), and with two serving volunteers (of approx. 31 serving at the time)<sup>39</sup>. All the interviews were unstructured, in order to encourage a free-ranging discussion of the problem at hand (the institutionalisation of gender equality into VSO-Philippines, following a separate gender programme - ISWID). I also had the opportunity to engage informally with the staff at the VSO-Philippines office, participate in a planning meeting for a gender training workshop (the participants of which I was able to follow-up later), and examine programme documentation. I found that all the people I spoke to had strong feelings on the issues I was raising, and it was in response to their input that the research focus modified from finding out how VSO had learned or failed to learn from the previous gender programme, ISWID, to asking more detailed questions about the relationship between VSO and volunteers, and the gender relations of volunteers,

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<sup>39</sup> See Appendices 1 and 2 for a full list of interviews and interviewees.

understood as individual development agents.

The pilot study gave an overall picture of the activities of VSO in the Philippines, and how my research might usefully engage with the relationship between individual volunteers and development. The Philippines study also provided ideas for fictional scenarios to use with group discussions. During the pilot phase I was also able to canvas views (and hold one interview) with some representatives of women's organisations. This provided me with some contextual flavour outside the immediate context of VSO-Philippines, as well as giving an insight into the frustrations of feminist women's organisations who are trying to work within a framework of development.

#### Follow-up telephone interviews with VSO-Philippines staff:

On my return to the UK, I carried out two follow-up telephone interviews with the Programme Director and gender programme manager in VSO-Philippines. These two interviews were particularly important as at the time of my pilot trip, the programme director had not been in the country, and the gender programme manager had only just taken the post. The interviews were semi-structured around the 3As<sup>40</sup>, and provided me with a more focused insight into the perspective of a country programme, of which I already had an overview.

#### Interviews in VSO-London:

Following the re-focusing of my research to look at the role of individual development agents, I carried out a total of 25 interviews in VSO London (which has approximately 220 staff). Of these 15 I categorised as being involved in programme and strategic work, usually located in the overseas division, or members of the senior management team. I

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<sup>40</sup> See Appendix 3 for the interview guide questions.

carried out another five interviews with staff involved in the recruitment and training of volunteers (including those involved with returned volunteers), which I categorised as recruitment division. I also carried out five interviews with advocacy and global education staff, which I categorised as communications division. Again, I found that people were not only willing, but keen, to talk about the issues I was raising. The VSO project supervisor (who set up the interviews for me) had no problems encouraging people to talk to me, and only had positive feedback from the respondents, many of whom felt they had had an opportunity to explore issues they might not have done otherwise (Alexia Coke, personal communication). The interviews were all semi-structured around the 3As, and took on a dialogic character, in which participants were able not just to 'give' answers, but to explore the issues with me and present their own perspective, including the contradictions and inconsistencies that inevitably emerged from such a process.

### Group discussions:

In order to complement individual interviews, I also held group discussions which could open up particular issues more broadly for negotiation. In each group discussion I used a selection of fictional scenarios<sup>41</sup> (vignettes) I had written on which to base a set of questions. In all the discussions except one I split the group into smaller groups to read and discuss the scenarios, which were then discussed with the entire group.<sup>42</sup> The group discussions involved two layers of dialogue to the research process:

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<sup>41</sup> See Appendix 4 for a description of the scenarios, and a list of the groups they were used with.

<sup>42</sup> With the smallest group (regional programme managers) they remained as one group, discussing each scenario in turn. However, this change in method also changed the dynamic: rather than the group discussion being between members of a particular small group and the rest of the whole group, the discussion became more between me and the group as a whole. I became more of a participant and less of

- Between myself (the researcher) and individual staff or volunteers in the groups
- Within the group of participating staff, and, in the case of the Returned Volunteer Weekend, between staff and volunteers. Within this second layer, the group was able to engage in more 'analytic reflection ... about group functioning' (Robson 1993, p.197), and I became a facilitator of a process which the participants were using for their own ends.

The scenarios were designed to look at volunteers' attitudes and behaviour, VSO's relationship with volunteers, and the construction of what makes a good volunteer. They were very successful, particularly with volunteer discussion groups, as the scenarios 'evoked' situations they were able to recognise (Robson 1993, p.197), and groups discussed them easily without having to discuss their own personal situation (although many volunteers did also give information on their own personal experience in the course of the discussion).

#### Email interviews with serving VSO-Philippines volunteers:

I emailed interview questions to the participants of the gender training, which I had helped to plan during my pilot field work phase. I received 6 responses of 7 participants; plus one additional 'gender' volunteer (of about 30 currently serving volunteers). The answers were full and detailed, and gave an insight into the attitudes of currently serving volunteers, particularly those who felt alienated by the gender training and saw this as an opportunity to give their feedback. Again, I found the research respondents were turning to me to voice their concerns. Throughout this process I kept the

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a facilitator.



representation of these voices at the centre of the research, as it is the relationship with them that has been central to the success of the dialogic approach. The questions used the 3As as a framework through which to investigate the institutionalisation of gender equality.

#### Survey of VSO-Philippines employer organisations:

Thirty one survey<sup>43</sup> questionnaires were sent to employers by email and through the Philippines programme office by volunteer post and I received twelve responses. The questions required tick box responses, with room for extra comments. The surveys were designed to ask about:

- what is expected of a volunteer and whether this includes what is expected of a volunteer with respect to gender relations
- what ideas of volunteer accountability are held by employers and whether this relates to both professional and personal areas of a volunteer's life
- and what ideas of partnership with VSO are held by employers

The one question that prompted most respondents to give extra comments was the question on a volunteer's private life, and ideas of accountability for this. Although not detailed, this survey gave an insight into the relationship between VSO and their partners, and particularly how partner organisations perceived the role of volunteering in development. This was perhaps the least 'dialogic' element of the research methods used, and as such I have only used these results to contextualise some of the respondents' concerns, and to provide an insight into the specific case context of VSO-Philippines and VSO-Philippines volunteers.

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<sup>43</sup> See Appendix 5 for the survey.

### Observations of pre-departure volunteer training weekends:

I attended two pre-departure volunteer training weekends: Preparing for Change (PfC), and Volunteers and Development (V+D). Preparing for change is compulsory for all volunteers, and although Volunteers and Development was not compulsory at the time, it was attended by a high proportion of volunteers (about 85%) and is now compulsory for all volunteers. My attendance was as a participant observer, which meant that I was able to join in the activities as if I were a potential volunteer, but that my status as a researcher was clearly presented to the rest of the group. This gave me an opportunity to explore some of the issues presented to potential volunteers, and to engage informally with the volunteers on the course. Thus I was able to 'explain the meaning of the experiences of the observed through the experiences of the observer' (Robson 1993, p.194). However, although I was participating in the course, my status as an outside researcher also enabled me to engage with the trainers, and particularly on the V+D course my participation took on a more assertive character as I engaged with the gender issues emerging during the course.

My observation notes and reports were structured around:

- understandings of volunteering, development and gender equality
- the relationship between VSO and volunteers and the issues this raised for the management of agency in the organisation
- opportunities and constraints to learning (by and from volunteers)
- assumptions of accountability (to and from volunteers)
- volunteer participation in course (and my participation)

### Observation of RV weekend:

I also attended a weekend held for returned volunteers, which was attended by approximately 80 volunteers (the total serving volunteers at any one time is about 2000). These weekends are held three times per year, and give returned volunteers a chance to discuss issues that have arisen from their placement. These weekends are also an opportunity for VSO to offer support and information to returned volunteers to help them to re-settle in the UK, and to solicit their continued involvement in VSO's work via global education and advocacy initiatives. My status was as an observer, but I was not able to participate on the same level as I had done in the pre-departure weekends (as I had not had the experience of being a volunteer). However, this weekend was an opportunity to see at first hand the relationship between VSO and (some) volunteers. It is important to recognise that volunteers attending an RV weekend are those who are concerned to reflect on their experiences and stay involved with VSO. They therefore represent a particular group of volunteers, rather than the volunteer body as a whole. I held a group discussion (structured around scenarios) which was well attended, and I was able to engage in dialogue through this and through informal contact both with returned volunteers, and VSO staff from London and from the recruitment bases in Kenya and the Philippines.

My observation notes were structured around:

- VSO's relationship with volunteers and the issues this raised for the management of agency in the organisation
- understandings of gender equality, volunteering and development and the assumptions that under-pinned these
- opportunities/constraints to learning

- assumptions about accountability

#### Feedback workshop and ISMT meeting:

On May 8<sup>th</sup> 2002, I held a special feedback workshop for the research, jointly facilitated with the VSO research project supervisor<sup>44</sup>. Twenty people attended, of 38 invited<sup>45</sup>. The participants consisted of 11 staff from overseas, six from recruitment and training, one Philippines returned volunteer, and two staff members from advocacy/global education. This workshop was primarily part of the validation of my research results through discussion of preliminary findings, but was also designed for VSO to engage with the research as a learning opportunity.

The relationship between the research project and VSO was itself a learning relationship. I learned about VSO, and through this research project other organisations will be able to learn from VSO's experience. On the other side, part of the motivation for VSO undertaking a CASE studentship was to learn from academic research:

*'I feel that the challenge for NGOs is to look at research and see how it can be applied, and also to challenge academics to produce research which is usable for organisations like ourselves... there was some thinking about this research ... potentially feeding into our future thinking.'* (Alexia Coke, VSO research supervisor – 2001-2003)

The workshop tested a central concept of my findings, that of 'gendered volunteering'<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Alexia Coke

<sup>45</sup> People invited included all interviewees, group discussion participants, SMT members, and other interested people.

<sup>46</sup> 'Gendered volunteering' was a specific concept devised for the purposes of the feedback workshop, but I have not used it as a central concept of my findings and is therefore not central to the remainder of the

– i.e. understandings that volunteering itself involves gender relationships within both the public and private roles of the volunteer. It was designed not only to discuss this and other findings, however, but also to provide an opportunity for the participants to use the framework of the 3As to formulate their own analysis and strategies to address gender equality in VSO in both the immediate and longer terms. This relates to the original derivation of the 3As by Johnson and Wilson (2000) as an agenda-setting framework for negotiating action (see above). Furthermore, although the research was linked to future action through the rôle of the VSO project supervisor, the workshop also linked the research to an immediate need for action within VSO to address gender equality.

The workshop design was thus structured around the 3 As as a framework, broadly consisting of the following elements:

- Mapping assumptions about where gender equality fits into VSO's work at present (implicitly/explicitly)
- Assumptions about the meanings and implications of 'gendered volunteering'
- Assumptions about what is needed to implement changes in 'gendered volunteering'
- Who should be responsible, what support is needed and how different actors can be held to account
- The indicators of change required to help establish attribution of cause and effect
- Wrapping together the challenges for VSO and how to deal with them.

The initial mapping of gender equality in VSO as participants saw it was, for most, a quick and easy process. But there was considerable discussion in all groups about the

meaning and implications of 'gendered volunteering', and none of the groups really came to a common understanding. So whilst the research outcome in this case was not a negotiated understanding of gender equality in the context of volunteering, it did succeed in initiating dialogue within the organisation, and confronting some of the assumptions previously held on the meaning of 'gender'.<sup>47</sup>

### **3.7 Conclusions to Chapter 3**

The theoretical background to this thesis puts the research in the context of feminist analysis of public and private spheres. Whilst using this theoretical framework, it was also important to be aware of possible methodological traps. The first trap was over-emphasising structures and casting social agents as passive, and the second was over-emphasising the role of agents and missing the formative role played by underlying social structures. I have tried to maintain the balance between these two by ensuring the focus on individuals and their relationships, whilst framing the study in an understanding of power as outlined in Chapter 2, particularly the structural power of discourse and social institutions. Perhaps most importantly however, in understanding how gender relations are negotiated at the level of discourse and conceptual understanding, I have not forgotten the material reality of both volunteers and development organisation staff, both in the Philippines and in the UK, and the very real commitment they showed to addressing the injustices of poverty and disadvantage.

There was also potential conflict between the clear theoretical framework that is needed for case study work, and some of the ideas of feminist epistemology, which emphasise

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<sup>47</sup> My workshop presentation was presented again in a slightly modified form to the VSO International Senior Management Team meeting on July 10<sup>th</sup> 2002. This was a more formal occasion, with just time for a few questions and answers (see Chapter 1 for an 'impression' report).

the need to ground the research in the perspective of the research subjects. But there is a certain amount of flexibility in the case study approach, which allows cases to be grounded in the research situation, to suit the study and to respond to the needs and concerns of the research subjects/participants. More broadly, the negotiation processes in the course of this research project, particularly of fieldwork, have meant attempting to balance the academic needs of the research with the practical opportunities and constraints of a development organisation.

The principle of participation in this research project has meant that all of my respondents have been selected as 'key informants' from different areas of the organisation. There has not therefore been any random sampling and I make no claim to represent all the views of people within VSO. Whilst representation is not and should not be a goal of case study research, I have nevertheless tried with the selection of informants to create a balanced picture of the organisation, the people associated with it, and the work that it carries out. Some respondents were already sympathetic to the idea of challenging the boundaries between public and private spheres. However, the research also included those who expressed resistance to the expansion of 'private' gender interests into the public sphere, and articulated their opposition more extremely than probably exists more widely in the organisation. Therefore, the research was able to access illustrative data from people with strong opinions, as well as the majority who do not hold strong opinions, but nevertheless carry assumptions about gendered norms and practices.

Data analysis also posed some methodological problems. The methodology I have used values the stories and perspectives of individual respondents, and has attempted to use these to create an illustrative picture of the situation. However, problems of standpoint emerge from this, with the temptation to over-simplify respondents' perspectives.

Clearly none of the individual respondents present just one clear perspective, and there are many nuances and contradictions in each one. I have tried to present these as illustrative of the point (that it is difficult to 'see' gender relations clearly from within an institutionalised context) whilst also using different methods to try to triangulate and balance individual responses. Throughout the thesis I have been conscious of my own subjective role in 'seeing' gender relations from an informed point of view, and interpreting responses in the light of my own awareness of the implications of the structural barriers between public and private spheres. To acknowledge and work with my own subjectivity is an important part of feminist research. But to use my own academic and political background in this way also ensured that some of the other problems associated with standpoint theory (the reification of oppressive situations) have been recognised and addressed, by maintaining a clear and sound analysis of the gendered nature of institutions.

In this chapter then, I have outlined the epistemological basis, the methodological approach, the methods and the research strategy I have used to carry out this research, and the ways in which these have allowed me not just to investigate the institutionalisation of gender equality into volunteering, but also to engage actively with both the data and my own analysis in the process.



## **Chapter 4: Background to VSO**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the background of VSO in the UK, and the path it has taken from a volunteer-sending organisation to a development organisation working through volunteers. This chapter provides an insight into how this change in VSO has affected the understandings of volunteering, development, and the role of volunteering in development, and how these understandings are related to VSO's deep structure: the 'values, history, culture and practices' (Rao et al. 1999, p.2) of the organisation. A gender analysis of volunteering is part of the subject matter of later chapters.

VSO in London is an organisation of about 220 staff, located within six divisions that deal with different areas of VSO's work:

1. Overseas (programmes and programme offices)
2. Recruitment (of volunteers, including placement advice – or 'skills teams' - and volunteer training)
3. Communications (including campaigns, global education, and returned volunteer issues)
4. Partnership development (including VSO recruitment offices in other parts of the world and developing new ways of working)
5. Fundraising
6. Resources

At any one time, there are between 1500 and 2000 volunteers overseas, and the returned

volunteer service holds a database of over 30,000 returned volunteers. These numbers indicate the high level of support and administration that is needed simply to ‘process’ volunteers through the system, from the first enquiry through to post-placement involvement with VSO through global education, networks of returned volunteers, and other activities. VSO is thus a large organisation, with different divisions representing different parts of its organisational mandate, and forming different kinds of relationship with volunteers. Volunteers come into contact with different divisions at the various stages in their VSO ‘journey’ (recruitment, placement, in-country, and returned), and all parts of VSO are involved in creating an understanding of volunteering and VSO’s work, and forging the relationship between VSO and volunteers.

## **4.2 The origins of VSO**

The idea of VSO originated in the particular experience of its founder, Alec Dickson. Dickson witnessed the action of a volunteer who engineered the escape of refugees across the Hungarian border with Austria in 1956. The volunteer bought a boat in Vienna and used it to transport the refugees across the canal to safety. It was this action, rather than those of large agencies and programmes that made the difference, according to Dickson (Bird 1998, p.12). In a personal history of VSO, Bird (1998) argues that the central idea of volunteering and the benefits it holds for both volunteer and host is the same today as it was then. He quotes from Robert Kennedy (1966, then US Attorney-General):

*‘... Each time a man stands up for an ideal or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centres of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression.’ (Bird*

Bird portrays the origins of VSO, founded in 1958, as a useful and adventurous experience for school leavers (mostly young men), although in the original Dickson conception, adventure was something perceived by the volunteer, rather than part of the definition of the activity of volunteering. Bird also emphasises that voluntary service was understood as something shared across cultures and generations, and that did not belong exclusively to rich or white people. But in Dickson's original ideas, it did belong to young people – 18-19 year olds. It also centred on service, and the way in which help is given and received (ibid. p.16). VSO was founded on 'a kind of fierce joy at feeling needed' (ibid. p.13).

In the beginning, volunteers were placed through personal contacts, and contacts between schools and churches. There were 15 volunteers in the first year, all boys from public schools, and the vast majority going on to places at Oxford or Cambridge Universities. Girls started to appear the following year. Throughout the 1960s (despite Dickson himself resigning as director) the abiding image of VSO as an altruistic adventure persisted and grew. This is a lasting image of VSO that many people still hold today:

*'Well, I tell you - whoever did the marketing and PR back in the 1950s did the most fantastic job, because that is still the sense of what VSO is all about, and nobody has been able to overturn it since.'* (Interview CD5)

However there have been enormous changes in the volunteers themselves, the length and type of their placements, and the framework in which their placements are formulated. During the 1960s period there was an increasing number of graduates, and some 'development volunteers' – technically or professionally qualified and

experienced volunteers. Government funding gave the organisation more financial security, and British Council and British Embassy offices worked as the VSO 'overseas arm' to find placements and act as contact for the volunteers in country. Thus at this stage VSO was at least informally linked to British government structures.

In the 1970s, wider debate in the development community in the UK about how to reach the poorest people and countries gave rise to criticism and reappraisal of volunteer postings. At the time, VSO was conscious that many placements did not reach the poorest sections of society, with many of its volunteers, for example, teaching in elite schools. Some returned volunteers began more overt political campaigning on the situation of the world's poor, but VSO continued to see itself as a politically neutral, responsive agency, a character which was personified by its director at the time, Douglas Whiting. With the arrival of the next director in 1973 (David Collett), VSO's purpose became more focused on addressing poverty than on providing adventure training (ibid. p.94) and by the end of the decade volunteer school leavers had been phased out and there was more emphasis on qualified graduates. By the end of the 1970s, VSO had secured 'strategic government funding' of 90%, but saw itself as independent from government, which was helped by the establishment of its own field offices from the mid 1970s. However, although Bird sees VSO as independent from government in policy, recruitment and programming, the links with the British government and its influence (particularly in overseas programmes) seem to have remained more significant throughout the 1980s, at least unofficially<sup>48</sup>.

The 1980s saw the arrival of Frank Judd as director, and another shift in the character of the agency. According to a long-term employee of VSO, the character of the director

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<sup>48</sup> For example, traditional allegiances of VSO to the British government through the Embassy in a particular country, although these are now fading.

has been the most significant element in defining VSO as an organisation. Given that directors were only allowed to serve for one 'term' of 5 years<sup>49</sup>, this meant that VSO changed fairly rapidly in response to the new leaders throughout the 60s, 70s and 80s:

*'It's all about people and key people...[Under Frank Judd<sup>50</sup>] it was an organisation of personalities, and the common feature was the volunteers - we were all dealing with volunteers... Then he was succeeded by a person who had a much stronger style ... very focused on getting the right jobs in, and... delivering what had been promised...*

*'...I really think in VSO's case the director has formed the direction [of the organisation] ...With Neil<sup>51</sup> we were a volunteer sending agency - we didn't use development at all. David<sup>52</sup> started bringing in development. And now with Mark<sup>53</sup> it's all about development. So volunteers are now the 'tool' with which we work. Prior to that the tool and what we were, was the same.'* (Interview RDI)

The focus of the debate within UK development organisations had also moved on by the 1980s, and a 1985 Overseas Development Administration (ODA)<sup>54</sup> evaluation of VSO's activities pointed to the need for more focus on poverty. The pressure from ODA (and subsequently the Department for International Development (DFID)) has continued to be important in influencing VSO's focus, locating the organisation in the framework of

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<sup>49</sup> The exception to this was David Green, director from 1990-1999.

<sup>50</sup> Frank Judd, Director from 1980-1985

<sup>51</sup> Neil McIntosh, Director from 1985-1990

<sup>52</sup> David Green, Director from 1990-1999

<sup>53</sup> Mark Goldring, Director from 2000.

<sup>54</sup> The British government department dealing with overseas development, replaced by the Department for International Development (DFID) after the 1997 general election.

development as a response to poverty, rather than purely as a volunteer-sending organisation:

*'At the moment, DFID has become a very strong stakeholder. Pre-Clare Short<sup>55</sup>, on paper it looked like a very strong stakeholder, but it wasn't because the government didn't have an agenda. It was basically 'here's the money, we trust you'. Clare Short's agenda is much more 'here's the money - we don't trust you and I want to know what you're doing with it'. And if you don't fit that agenda... I suspect that our next tranche of money would be much less.'* (Interview RD1)

*'Around the time that DFID wrote the white paper<sup>56</sup>, VSO was really having a good, hard look at whether we could follow a poverty agenda or not. Whether volunteering can make a contribution or not. And the last corporate strategic plan 'Increasing The Impact' said that yes, we believe that it's possible... we'll write country strategic plans and identify who the disadvantaged groups are and so on.'* (Interview OD10)

By the 1990s VSO had arrived at a point where the central idea of its work was not so much the volunteer experience, but the development work that could be carried out through volunteers. And nowadays, DFID has a different role. It is still powerful stakeholder in VSO, as it provides the majority of the organisation's funding, but it doesn't

*'play the game of British trade interests in the way that ODA did when it was part of the FCO<sup>57</sup>. This has broken the monopoly of government interests that is*

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<sup>55</sup> Minister of State for International Development 1997-2003

<sup>56</sup> The White Paper set out the 1997 Labour Government's priorities for International Development.

<sup>57</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office

*continued through other organisations like the British Council' (Interview PHIL8).*

The face of volunteers has also changed. The average volunteer in the 1990s was in his or her 30s (with many more older or post-retirement volunteers), recruited from the UK, Netherlands and Canada, for a period of 2 years. Other programmes also emerged, including shorter-term placements and schemes for younger volunteers. Volunteers became more involved and vocal about issues to do with VSO and with their placement, and both in the UK overseas division and in the country programme offices, VSO staff members were seen as development professionals.

### **4.3 Becoming a development organisation: strategic planning in VSO**

Accompanying the changing perspective on VSO's orientation to its work and the increasing professionalisation of its staff and volunteers was the introduction of strategic planning, at both corporate and country programme levels. The development of purpose and values gave VSO more focus and definition as an organisation, and made it less subject to the particular character of the director. The first plan, *'Investing in People'* (1992-97), concentrated on diversifying the activities of volunteers and forms of volunteer placements. The period of the plan also included the development of recruitment bases in Canada and the Netherlands, and a greater emphasis on harnessing the potential of returned volunteers for global education and advocacy initiatives. The second plan, *'Increasing the Impact'* (1997-2002), stated the intention to increase the size and reach of the VSO programmes, concentrating on reaching disadvantaged and marginalised people. In the process of producing *'Increasing the Impact'*, 'disadvantage' was defined as including physical weakness, isolation, vulnerability and

powerlessness, as well as income poverty<sup>58</sup>. The resulting plan also stressed the need to diversify the activities of volunteers and forms of volunteer placements, and the period of the plan saw the development of recruitment offices in Kenya and the Philippines. Reading these two plans side-by-side illustrates the first moves from a concentration on sending more and better volunteers, to focusing the work of VSO volunteers more strategically on reaching disadvantaged sections of society.

'Focus for Change' (2002)<sup>59</sup> was the third VSO corporate strategic plan. This plan located VSO firmly alongside other UK development organisations by including a preface outlining its 'vision' of its own role in development, and providing more analysis of volunteering as VSO's contribution to the development process:

*'The plan defines VSO's distinctive competence: the contribution of international volunteering to development. It sets out our change agenda ... Focus for Change is a guiding framework which will enable us to make more detailed plans so we can focus all VSO's efforts to achieve our purpose.'* (VSO 2002, p.1)

The plan built on a rights-based approach to development, reflecting UK development debates and expressly linked to VSO's understanding of disadvantage.

*'VSO sees development as a complex and continuous process that empowers*

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<sup>58</sup> This analysis of disadvantage was developed in VSO during the preparation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> strategic plan 'Increasing the Impact' (VSO 1997), in order to emphasise an analysis of poverty that was broader than income poverty (Bob Ruxton, VSO Overseas Division, personal communication). It draws on Chambers' (1983) 'deprivation trap', where deprivation is linked to isolation, poverty, physical weakness, vulnerability and powerlessness (Chambers 1983, p. 112).

<sup>59</sup> Focus for Change is supposed to remain relevant for five years, but it does not have a fixed 'life-span' (Mark Goldring in Focus for Change, VSO 2002, p. 1)



*people and communities to fight disadvantage, take control of their future and fulfill their potential. Human rights, including an education, a livelihood, health care, a safe environment, a say in the future and equal access to opportunity, are all vital for development.*

*VSO describes lack of access to these fundamental human rights as disadvantage.’ (VSO 2002, p.4)*

In ‘*Focus for Change*’, Volunteering was seen as an effective response to disadvantage as it can ‘bring together people from different cultures and backgrounds, enabling them to share skills and learning’ (VSO 2002, p.5). The limitations of volunteering as a response to the needs of the poorest people were however also recognised, as in order for volunteers to be effective, partner organisations needed to be able to provide adequate structure and resources (ibid. p.6).

In addition to the nuances in VSO’s perspectives on poverty and development, there was a shift in how VSO located itself in the external context of the ‘international community’, and the plan recognises the role of VSO ‘within the broader development context’ (ibid. p.3). This is also apparent in the different attitudes to programme size between the second and third plans: whilst ‘*Increasing the Impact*’ aimed to enlarge VSO’s programmes, ‘*Focus for Change*’ foresaw reducing the number of countries in which volunteers work, and streamlining the management systems of the remaining country programme offices. ‘*Focus for Change*’ also aimed to put VSO on a more independent footing, decreasing its funding relationship with DFID, and making it a development organisation that would need to fundraise alongside other organisations with similar aims and objectives (ibid. p. 27).

Respondents from VSO in London reinforced the idea of a more strategic

developmental approach when questioned in interviews on the strategic direction of VSO:

*'We're moving from being purely a volunteer-sending organisation, with some kind of wish list on development, to a more development focused organisation, that still works through volunteers, but the emphasis is very important.'*

*(Interview OD10)*

*'For the past 5 or so years, there have been an increasing number of people at management level in the overseas division that have been pushing the development agenda, and have prioritised thinking about the organisation as a development organisation. ...Increasing the Impact effectively [gave this] a corporate thumbs up... written in a way that repositioned VSO, stressing disadvantage as the focus of its development activity.'* (Interview OD9)

The developmental approach in VSO was often characterised as a 'programmatic' approach, and this had a substantial effect on VSO's deep structure, including the role of volunteers. Whereas before, placements and partnerships with employers were individualised and not necessarily linked to one another, under a programmatic approach activities (including, but not limited to placements) are linked to make up VSO's programme as a coordinated whole in a particular country. A programmatic approach also involves longer-lasting partnerships with organisations (which might involve one or more placements), engaging with other activities such as advocacy and recognising the interdependency of livelihoods, HIV/AIDS and gender (Lawrence 2001, p.2). In *'Focus for Change'*, the programmatic approach was assessed in country programmes to see how effectively and developmentally they responded to an analysis of their external environment, and this was used to plan the continuation or closure of some country programmes (interview OD9). This shows how central the developmental

role of VSO has become, and how important it is to the future direction of VSO.<sup>60</sup>

Even though VSO no longer sees itself as purely a volunteer-sending organisation, volunteering is still central to the deep structure of VSO:

*'It's still a volunteering organisation. Our main way of working is still through volunteers. We're never going to lose that - that's our competence, that's what we are good at.'* (Interview OD9)

This comment from a senior overseas division member of staff became a familiar one during my fieldwork. The concern to emphasise volunteering as important within the context of development indicates a tension within VSO as an organisation. For some VSO staff members, the emphasis on being a development organisation has detracted from VSO's ability to concentrate on volunteers and volunteering. The tension is not as simple as a split between volunteering and development, as both are central to VSO's organisational identity. For most VSO staff and volunteers who acted as respondents in either interviews or group discussions in the substantive (UK-based) phase of this study, it's more a question of emphasis. Those who continue to emphasise volunteering as VSO's primary activity might say that VSO volunteers have always been involved with development in their role as volunteers, and those who emphasise VSO's development credentials often say that volunteering is the way in which VSO carries out its

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<sup>60</sup> A review of the country strategic planning process in 2001 highlighted constraints of the process for the programme offices, such as sparing time and capacity for strategic planning at the same time as running the programme. According to the reviewers, as each country office designed integrated programmes rather than responded to a number of isolated requests for volunteers, the relationship between VSO programme offices and the corporate level needed to be renegotiated and many of the systems and structures needed to be changed to deal with the developmental rather than volunteer focus (Wallace and Wilson 2001).

development work (VSO's 'methodology' according to some). Some staff and volunteers however do feel the tension between development and volunteering, with some who are placed in more traditional 'service-delivery' roles feeling devalued as the emphasis of VSO's work shifts to more strategic, developmental roles (Wallace and Wilson 2001).

#### **4.4 Volunteers: organisational debates and current questions**

Despite the evident tensions within the organisation, volunteers are seen as the central element of VSO's work, and VSO's 'unique people-to-people approach' (VSO N.D., p.1). But what makes a volunteer?

In 2002, VSO launched a campaign to recruit more volunteers as numbers of applicants fell because of security fears post 9/11. This campaign concentrates on how volunteers are 'needed' to fight poverty and suffering: *'We don't need your tears, we need skilled professionals and we need them now'* (VSO 2003a). Thus in the recruitment literature, volunteering is presented as a chance to give skills and values, as well as to learn, gain experience, and experience adventure:

*'Travel and adventure beyond the backpacker's trail:*

*'A chance for extraordinary career development, the opportunity to meet people with different life experiences, make friends and learn from each other, immerse yourself in a culture far removed from the pace of modern Western life, challenge yourself and find skills that you never knew you had... all while making a difference in some of the most disadvantaged countries in the world...*

*'These are just some of the features of the VSO graduate experience.'* (VSO 2003a)

Volunteering is also often presented as a challenge, an opportunity to see if one can meet the high standards which VSO presents of its volunteers and their work. For example posters portray volunteers, generally with counterparts, with captions saying 'VSO is ... professional, cost-effective, passionate', etc. Or volunteering is portrayed as a 'test' of one's ability to survive and even thrive outside the comfortable home environment:

*'Have you got what it takes? Could you get teenagers talking about HIV and health? Could you learn to make lab equipment out of tin cans and cola bottles? Could you live without Eastenders and Big Brother?' (VSO, 2003b)*

Some of the literature also portrays it as an 'escape', a way to get off the treadmill of modern living for a while to indulge a need to 'give':

*'What makes a successful management consultant take time out from his City career to volunteer in a remote corner of Macedonia?' (Holland 2001, p.16)*

It is always presented as a temporary option – nothing permanent is ever offered (except a change in outlook). Although professional qualifications and experience are seen as necessary pre-requisites in order to place a volunteer, the recruitment literature also emphasises a volunteer's personal qualities, and the 'soft skills' basis to the assessment.

The 'essential qualities' looked for in a volunteer are:

*'self-assurance, adaptability, a flair for solving problems, ability to work in a team, sensitivity to the needs of others, a desire to learn, and a commitment to help others learn.' (VSO N.D., p. 14).*

The 'fierce joy at feeling needed' (Bird 1998, p.13) is still apparent in quotes from volunteers:

*'Now if I leave my village for more than a few days, on my return I am embraced by a crowd of children shouting "Mr. Justin, ekaabo", which means welcome.*

*That a European would come to Nigeria and live in a village rather than an air-conditioned compound has endeared me to the community.'* (Scully 2003)

*'There's something very peaceful about being with people who need you.'*  
*Maggie Donovan, Thailand (Donovan, 2002)*

*'However little I may be achieving, I know it's of importance to the children. I try to make the most of working with them – and that's the enjoyable part.'*  
*Pamela de Stratford, The Gambia, (VSO N.D., p. 13)*

But volunteering has changed since Alec Dickson's day, and volunteers are now much more aware of the need for them to be able to contribute to a sustainable impact through their work, as well as gaining from the experience themselves. Many volunteers I encountered during this research, on returning from their placements, said that they learned far more than they were able to give. Volunteers at a returned volunteer weekend that I attended complained that they did not think that their placement was really necessary and that they could have given more. Some volunteers felt as if they were making up the numbers of volunteers for the VSO programme, rather than being used to their full potential to contribute to the development of their community (observation notes, PO3). This suggests that volunteers have become more ambitious than they used to be, with broader objectives for impact, and higher expectations in terms of their developmental role. In some ways this is a result of how VSO has built up volunteers' understanding of what volunteering is about, and what impact they can hope to achieve. But in other ways it seems that volunteers themselves become interested in development during their placements, and for some volunteers VSO just was not

developmental enough in assessing and filling volunteer placements (observation notes, PO3).

The understanding of volunteering present in VSO appears to relate volunteering to development at different levels. Volunteers are encouraged and given an opportunity to study development issues during their placements. The material for the course 'Learning from Development' gives an overview of 'Development Dilemmas' and issues concerning health, education, technology and environment in the context of development. Volunteers' interaction with their employer organisations (many of which are NGOs), friends and colleagues, VSO programme office staff and other volunteers, can also give them insights and opportunities to form opinions on the development context and their role in that context<sup>61</sup>. This puts the volunteer experience in a different framework from the experiences of the first volunteers, although these too saw their experience as life-changing. In some areas, for example, Southern Africa, volunteers prefer to be known as 'volunteer development workers' which changes their identity to relate more closely to VSO as a development organisation, of which they perceive themselves a part (interview OD8). Other volunteers however reject the label of development worker and prefer to be known as 'volunteer professionals' (interview CD3), maintaining their primary identity as their profession or skills base. There is then a continuum along which volunteers place themselves in relationship to development.

At an organisational level, VSO has reflected on volunteering in the context of

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<sup>61</sup> In Chapter 6, I apply a framework which highlights how VSO work can be seen as being carried out 'through volunteers', whereas the work that a volunteer undertakes – the placement – can be seen as development 'by volunteers'. However, volunteering also contains the notion of development 'of volunteers', which reflects the idea that volunteers themselves should learn from the situation in which they are placed.

contemporary development organisations in some depth. This is illustrated by two internal documents: Henderson (2001), and Rockcliffe (2001). Henderson (2001) compares volunteering with technical co-operation. Technical co-operation generally involves short-term expatriate professional development ‘consultants’ and has been criticised for a lack of understanding of the local context. In contrast, VSO distinguishes itself and volunteering by referring to the close relationship formed between the volunteer and the local community. Although both volunteering and technical co-operation are top-down in terms of finances, administration and strategic direction located in the North, and although they both share the concept of ‘skills’ as central (‘sharing skills’ central to VSO, and ‘skills transfer’ as central to technical co-operation), Henderson defines the differences in VSO as:

- *‘Recipient led’ - responding to employer requests*
- *Culturally sensitive – volunteers live and work in the community, with emphasis on equality, respect and trust (compared to technical co-operation consultants who usually live outside of the community, are project based and tied to donor criteria)*
- *Involving lack of financial gain – and recognition of the costs of volunteering for the volunteer, as opposed to the financial and other gains associated with technical co-operation consultants*
- *Involving reciprocity – a key motivating factor in volunteering which goes beyond the placement to encompass learning from the whole volunteer experience in the context of development*
- *Enabling global education – the role of volunteers in increasing public knowledge of development on their return to their home contexts, bringing about policy change in support of development*
- *Combining ‘home volunteering as a good’ (Putnam) and ‘international*



*(Adapted from Henderson 2001, p. 3)*

International understanding, reciprocity, cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity are all part of VSO's expectations of volunteering, and translate into individual volunteer motivations to achieve new understandings through their relationships with local colleagues and community. The historical assumption is that 'internationalism' consists of a Northern volunteer going to a Southern context. But VSO has gone further than this in developing an understanding of internationalism in volunteering:

*'No longer is it North to South or even South to South but a coming together of people in a development process which affects each individual and contributes to the global community from which we all come.'* (Henderson 2001, p. 11)

The idea of a global community in which VSO is a facilitator of exchanges between different people has also been expressed by Rockcliffe (2001) of VSO as a 'new paradigm' of development through volunteers, including referring to possibilities of South-North exchanges through the VSO youth programme.

Although the vast majority of VSO's work continues to focus on the two year professional placement, different types of volunteering have also been explored in the VSO publication *Orbit: Voices from the Developing World* (Holland 2001).

Volunteering has been portrayed as a role carried out in a multitude of contexts (of which VSO only forms a small part), and primarily being about relationships: about enriching the volunteer, her/his environment, and those s/he meets. But Holland (2001) argues that voluntary activity is undervalued by many policy makers, equated with compulsion or lack of professionalism in some cultures, and with 'sackcloth and sacrifice' in others. Despite these stereotypes, she asserts the role of volunteering both

as a valuable activity and as a valuable part of development initiatives, contributing to 'social capital', the networks of relationships that bind communities together. In this publication it is clear that as an organisation, VSO is affiliating itself to other organisations and people who are concerned with volunteering as a distinct and valuable activity, with benefits above and beyond the transfer of skills or increase in technical capacity that might take place.

However, VSO volunteers do not in general identify themselves alongside volunteers in their home context, such as those who might work caring for others within their own community, or by giving time working in charity shops or local schools: they are not unpaid, their contribution is far from their home context, and their relationship with VSO and with their 'employer' organisation is on a professional basis, involving a long selection procedure. The notion of volunteering established by VSO could therefore be considered atypical in a UK-based context. VSO volunteers see themselves as professionally qualified people from outside the voluntary sector, temporarily contributing to a development organisation in a capacity *between* professional and unpaid staff.

#### **4.5 Conclusions to Chapter 4: is VSO more than an ordinary development organisation?**

The changes in VSO and its volunteers, and the tension I found within VSO between those committed to pursuing development goals and those emphasising volunteering as the central element, may be symptomatic of many values-based organisations working in development. For example, Lewis (2001) notes that:

*'[T]hird sector organisations are essentially 'value-driven' organisations [...]*

*this poses distinctive management challenges because people work in these voluntary organisations from a variety of public and private motivations: a sense of altruism, an escape route from dominant ideologies, or increasing public status ... [There are also] conflicts between voluntarism and professionalism, and the need to maintain sight of the organisation's founding values.' (Lewis 2001, pp. 21-22)*

Lewis further notes that such tensions have led writers such as Korten and Chambers to argue for a 'new development professionalism' (ibid. p. 22), accompanied by inclusive and consultative strategic planning processes (ibid. p. 23).

Specifically with reference to volunteers, Lewis outlines how their role and contribution have changed in all voluntary organisations (and particularly in development organisations since the early days of VSO's work):

*'Since the 1960s there has been a questioning of the idea that volunteers can be left to themselves in third sector organisations as well-meaning amateurs if their work has important social consequences, and a gradual move towards professionalisation can be detected, a combination of pressure from government and from inside many third sector organisation... has led to the managerialist view that volunteers should be treated as "unpaid professionals".'* (ibid. p. 170)

Most development organisations do not work, as VSO does, primarily through volunteers. But they do work through development agents, and many development organisations work through both paid professional staff and volunteers in different capacities. Thus development organisations experience many of the same tensions as in VSO, which can be said to arise from a common historical connection through the values-base of their organisational goals and objectives. It is possible to conclude, then,

that the insights from this thesis might well apply more broadly to other development organisations and the development agents associated with them.

With respect to values relating to gender, one can only speculate whether the 'adventure training' beginnings of VSO volunteering and the later promotion and preservation of individual professionalism have encouraged resistance to making gender a more explicit issue within volunteer roles. One respondent remarked:

*'VSO's had a very uncomfortable relationship with gender issues in my experience... It would be interesting to know if there was a gender agenda - I wouldn't be able to tell you what I thought the reaction would be. It wouldn't surprise me if there were people who felt it was being over-emphasised...I think the real problem is actually with implementing it, and I think there's a strong possibility that it would get up volunteers' noses - male volunteers... [because] it involves their identity.'* (Interview RD1)

Having a gender policy would need to be negotiated with the volunteers, which VSO has been reluctant to do for fear of volunteer reaction. Volunteers can thus be central to both change and resistance in the meaning of volunteering in development. Again, lessons from this experience may be relevant for understanding the relationship between structures and agency in relation to gender in other development organisations.

In this chapter, I have argued that the institutional meanings, norms and practices embedded in the deep structure of VSO are not static, but have changed over time, and are continuing to change as VSO moves from being a volunteer-sending organisation to being a development organisation that works through volunteers. The continuing centrality of volunteers emphasises the need for alternative management approaches, which alleviate the tension between management imperatives and the values-based

nature of the organisation. In remaining chapters of this thesis the relationship between VSO and volunteers will be used to highlight the role of negotiation in the construction and maintenance of the deep structure of VSO, and within that the negotiation of norms and practices around gender relations.

## **Chapter 5: VSO, development and gender**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In Chapter 4 I outlined VSO's transition from an organisation that used to send individual volunteers overseas to placements that were separate and distinct from each other, to an organisation with a coordinated developmental approach. I analysed the changes over time as portrayed in the strategic plans and the nature of the debate around the role of volunteers. This chapter examines how and to what extent gender equality has been incorporated into the understandings of volunteering and development in VSO. The chapter thus addresses the first part of my research question: 'how is gender equality understood in volunteering in development?'

I will first outline some of the limitations of an understanding of development that seeks to 'add in' gender analysis to an already existing framework. I will argue that, in the case of VSO, 'adding gender in' perpetuated assumptions about divisions between public and private spheres, and thus excluded crucial gender interests located in the private sphere. I will then examine VSO's approach to development through volunteers, in particular the importance of volunteers as individuals in VSO's development work. In exploring how volunteers have been conceptualised in relation to development, I identify a major issue for institutionalising gender equality: namely that it is impossible for VSO to separate its development work from its agents, as the agents are a central element of its organisational deep structure. Furthermore, although volunteer placements take place in the public sphere, a volunteer's role covers her/his experience in both public and private spheres, and the boundaries between these two spheres therefore overlap.

Finally, I analyse the VSO Philippines programme as a case study to investigate further

some of the implications of VSO's approach to gender and development issues. I argue that the case of the Philippines demonstrates that it is insufficient to 'add gender in' to an already existing framework of development, as illustrated by the limited effect of the gender programme (ISWID) on the rest of the VSO-Philippines programmes. However, I also argue that the Philippines country programme has been further limited in its ability to engage with gender issues because it has not engaged with the perceptions, attitudes and behaviour of the individual volunteers: the agents of development. In this case study, I re-think the place of gender equality in the understandings of development and volunteering in VSO.

## **5.2 VSO's analysis of development: the implications of becoming a development agency**

In taking on development objectives to guide its funded work, VSO has effectively bought into the poverty-focused understanding of development that is prevalent in UK development organisations in the early 21st Century<sup>62</sup>. As explained in Chapter 4, VSO has arrived at a definition of development that allows for volunteering to be seen as a contribution to a wider process of development, using the concept of 'disadvantage'<sup>63</sup>. But whether using the terminology of poverty or of disadvantage, the understanding of development adopted by VSO is similar to other development organisations, in that it seeks to alleviate some of the negative effects of 'progress' associated with liberal capitalism (Cowen and Shenton 1996), rather than challenging the underlying

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<sup>62</sup> The DFID White Paper produced in 1997 clearly emphasised the reduction of poverty as the central element of their objectives. As the major UK funding source (providing approximately 75% of VSO funding), DFID's priorities are important in order to understand the construction of development discourse in VSO.

<sup>63</sup> See Chapter 4 for an explanation of 'disadvantage'.

assumptions.

UK-based VSO staff interviewed for this study acknowledged that as a volunteer-sending development organisation, it is not possible for them to absorb completely the poverty-focused discourse and activities of a development organisation. But at the same time, these same respondents also pointed out the link between the values of volunteering and the values of development, for example:

*'We've probably taken on too much of the development language of other organisations too fast... I think we have to [ask] what are the common denominators between the good values that come from volunteering... and lots of other things being good development outcomes for ordinary people.'*  
(Interview OD11)

The pressure to fit the mainstream development framework was seen as great, as funding and legitimacy as a development organisation were dependent on measuring up to the accepted image:

*'[There has been] a need to mainstream [development], particularly with the emergence of DFID... So there was a sense of an eye to funding, an eye to our sources of doing the work that we wanted to do.'* (Interview OD9)

Thus VSO embarked on its strategic planning process partly to be seen as a more serious development organisation in the mould that is already accepted in the UK development funding context. The move was seen by many respondents as a positive one, and a way that VSO could become more authoritative as a development organisation with a contribution to make to both national and international level debates. This respondent illustrated how the image of a 'serious' development organisation was pursued when presenting VSO in UK media communications:



*'[We're] finding issues upon which VSO can stake its claim to be a development agency... We're constantly trying to position VSO as an agency that has something important and authoritative to say about the developing world, because at the moment we're not there.'* (Interview CD5)

VSO has thus been aiming to align itself with other development organisations, conforming to an accepted framework, but has not been questioning the framework itself. This section argues that adding gender into this framework of development perpetuates assumptions about the division between public and private spheres, and creates a tension between the development work of the organisation, and the agents of development: volunteers.

### **5.2.1 Adding in gender**

In adopting the discourse of development, many at the programme and policy level in VSO also saw an imperative to address gender issues.

*'I suspect that in response to the fact that the whole of the rest of the world has been talking about gender for the last 15 years or whatever it is... VSO cannot but be aware that we don't at the moment have a systematic approach to thinking how what we do will impact differently on men and women. [There is] an aspiration to rectify that whenever we talk about development goals.'*  
(Interview OD11)

*'...just sensible developmental analysis will always include gender analysis - whether we do it well or not so well.'* (Interview SMT3)

But whilst the need to address gender issues was widely acknowledged, almost all respondents in London and in the Philippines (including both VSO staff and volunteers) also acknowledged that there had been no significant movement to achieve this change.

For example, despite lobbying from many parts of the organisation, gender equality was not included as a strategic priority in VSO's 2002 strategic plan, *'Focus for Change'*.

Nevertheless, 'disadvantage' was held by some respondents in VSO to offer an effective way forward for addressing gender issues as it allowed gender inequality to be addressed outside of the limited framework of poverty<sup>64</sup> and to include groups of people who would otherwise be excluded, for example those affected by domestic violence (interview SMT3). However, whilst conceptually the idea of disadvantage might offer that possibility, all the VSO staff members I interviewed acknowledged that this was not the case in practice. Some VSO staff identified gender inequality as an element of development analysis in country strategic plans. But although gender inequality might appear as an element of disadvantage in their analysis of the context, it was often not well addressed in the resulting programme priorities:

*'[I]f you look at education, gender equity has been recognised ... and it's one of the things that we work towards with our volunteer process. But when you look at the number of CSPs [Country Strategic Plans] that have gender equality specified as part of their education aim, it's very few.'* (Interview OD10)

Only two Country Strategic Plans (CSPs) out of a total of 12 seen during the period of this research (2001-2002) identified gender inequality as a priority area to be addressed through volunteer placements (the Philippines and South Africa). In five or six plans (e.g. The Gambia, Pakistan) it was given the status of a 'cross-cutting theme', generally indicating an attempt to 'mainstream'<sup>65</sup> the concept into each area of work. In the

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<sup>64</sup> See Jackson 1998 for a detailed analysis of how gender can become lost in the 'poverty trap'.

<sup>65</sup> The idea of 'mainstreaming' gender equality is much debated (see Cornwall et al. 2004). Here I refer to the term as it was used within VSO, which located gender equality within an already existing framework of development, and programme of development interventions.

Pakistan country programme, gender inequality emerged as a part of the analysis of disadvantage, as a 'cross-cutting theme'. However it merged into the framework of VSO's work in the country, rather than informing any kind of substantive programme changes:

*'I think we had to prioritise what needed to happen in the programme and while gender was a key part of it there were other more fundamental things we had to get right before we could really tackle it in any meaningful way... I think we were fairly good at looking at our placements and saying is this placement benefiting girls or women, and how is it doing that? Or if it isn't should we be fulfilling this placement? So I think in a general way, in terms of targeting girls' education particularly, we were doing quite well.'* (Interview OD5)

In the Gambia there was a similar situation, where gender inequality came up in the strategic plan and there were one or two volunteers who addressed gender inequality in their placements, but this was outside the immediate objectives of the placement. Addressing gender inequality had not been integrated into the way in which placements were thought through, or into the way in which VSO operated in the Gambia:

*'[P]eople thought that we were doing a lot of work on gender. We weren't actually. It came up very strongly in our country strategic plan as something we needed to look at ... but we did it [work on gender] through [existing] placements.'* (Interview OD4)

The Southern Africa region had a separately funded, regionally coordinated programme on HIV/AIDS (called Regional AIDS Initiative of Southern Africa or RAISA). In this programme, gender inequality emerged as a priority area to be addressed in Southern Africa, mainly because of the personal commitment of the programme director, with

placements focusing on the issue of violence against women (Interview OD2). This offered the possibility of addressing gender inequality as an integrated part of this programme, but depended on the particular programme director. Interviews elsewhere in the organisation confirmed that whether or not gender inequality was addressed was often dependent on the individual programme director's own enthusiasm and commitment (interviews CD2 and OD2). This was also the case in the Philippines (interview OD3), which is examined later in this chapter.

Thus although addressing gender inequality was, in some cases (for example, in Pakistan and the Gambia) a part of placements, VSO staff in London interviewed for this study indicated that assumptions contained in the analysis of the placement context or within the design of the placement were not actually questioned. Addressing gender inequality had more of an 'add-on' characteristic than a sense of questioning the understandings contained within the framework of development itself. In particular, addressing gender inequality did not include the role played by volunteers as VSO's development agents.

An important part of questioning this understanding of development is to examine the relationship between public and private spheres, on which many of the norms and practices of unequal gender relations are built (see Chapter 2). In the context of VSO, this shift would involve addressing not only the public/private division in the lives of their target beneficiaries, but also the gender relations of volunteering, and the volunteers themselves. In other words, not just addressing VSO's development work (as undertaken through placements), but the perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of the agents of development themselves. This is a huge task, as recognised by one of the respondents in this study:

*'Starting from the inside [we would have to change] how we do things within the organisation, and then move on to volunteers developing even a minimal understanding of how gender works. We'd have to do all this before we could begin to make a claim that [we] were operating within an understanding of gender. And you work out all the steps from where we are now to where we would have to be to make that claim and it does seem to be a really daunting task.'* (Interview OD11)

But order to institutionalise gender equality into VSO, the remainder of this chapter will argue that it is important to look beyond strategic plans and country programmes, and question the core of VSO's work: volunteers.

### **5.2.2 Volunteering and development: creating a new discourse**

The tension between development work and the identity of the development agent is an issue for all development organisations. In the early years of development organisations operating in the post-colonial era, people and their (often personal) relationships to the places of which they had expertise and knowledge were central to how development interventions were designed and implemented (Kothari 2002; see also Chapter 2)<sup>66</sup>.

There was therefore a connection (often characterised as patronising) between the person running the programme and the place itself: the agent was central. Kothari argues that development has since become more dominated by technical expertise, which de-personalises how it is understood and carried out. Development agents are deemed to be neutral and invisible in development interventions today (ibid.).

But much of the literature on gender equality in development underlines the importance

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<sup>66</sup> Kothari (2002) has interviewed ex-colonial administrators who moved into development (working for agencies such as ODA) at the time of independence.

of understanding agency, particularly in the gender relations between people involved in development interventions, and in the context in which the interventions are carried out (Goetz 1997b, Porter et al. 1999). VSO, by taking on the discourse of a development organisation is in some ways also constructing a distance between development agent and development work. However, as volunteers are the central part of the organisation's work, constructing a distance creates a tension.

The discourse of development articulated by both staff and volunteer respondents throughout VSO, was inherently connected to volunteers, and volunteering. Although interviews indicated that there was almost universal agreement that the move towards development goals was a positive one for VSO, there was a difference in perspective between the divisions of VSO. There were those for whom development goals were paramount and volunteering had to be made to 'fit' them, and those for whom the emphasis had to remain on volunteers and volunteering as the central element of VSO's work (see also Chapter 4). For example, from the perspective of those in VSO primarily concerned with coordinating the developmental approach (most of these were located in the overseas division), the priorities of the recruitment division might have appeared to favour the 'processing' of vast numbers of volunteers through the VSO system, giving it a more limited view of development work (interview CD4). On the other hand some respondents reported that some volunteers felt that for them to adopt the discourse of development contained the risk of undermining their own professional identity in favour of becoming professional development workers (interviews CD3 and RD3). Other respondents in the recruitment division expressed a fear of development, and a sense of domination by overseas division in the decisions being made (interview RD4). Thus in VSO there was already a tension felt between the work that the organisation carried out, and the understanding of *how* this work was carried out by volunteers.

How volunteers were conceptualised as contributing to development was also not clear. Amongst volunteers (pre-departure and returned) and VSO staff interviewed for this project there was a division. For some, development was something that should be integral to volunteer roles, but found rather in their development work than in the volunteers themselves; but others regarded development as an extra expertise which volunteers should acquire - if not pre-departure then during their placements. A few volunteer respondents saw volunteering as a way in to development. For example, interview CD2, also an ex-volunteer, saw her period of volunteering as a way of gaining not just expertise and experience, but also credibility on a professional development 'ladder'<sup>67</sup>. Other volunteers described themselves (or are described by others) as 'serial' volunteers: volunteers who filled several placements, over a period of many years, who always maintained a strong identity as a volunteer and who did not seek other employment as a professional development worker in VSO or other development organisations (interview PHIL1). These volunteers regarded volunteering as distinctly different from being a professional development worker. And there were also volunteers who regarded development as a distraction from their primary professional identity, and something for which they did not have time. An illustrative quote for this attitude came from a participant at the returned volunteers weekend: *'Teachers teach'* (observation notes, PO3). This implies that to engage with development would demand their attention and time, and therefore detract from their ability to teach. Thus whilst accepting the ethos of volunteering in the context of development, there was no clear consensus on exactly how the one relates to the other.

Within VSO, senior members of staff in all the divisions in which I conducted interviews indicated that 'skills sharing' was key to the unique value of VSO volunteers,

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<sup>67</sup> The 'development ladder' idea was prominent amongst serving and returned volunteers. It implies buying into a set agenda of development expertise.

with the volunteer placement as the central focus for both the volunteer experience and VSO's development work:

*'What we understand happens is not that somebody from the North goes to tell somebody from the South how to do something, but that the person from the North brings their knowledge and experience, the people from the South bring theirs, and between them they create new knowledge, they create new experience... It's actually knowledge creating.'* (Interview OD10)

Volunteers were almost uniformly expressed by these respondents as the methodology/ the centre/ the reason VSO and VSO programmes exist, and volunteering had a unique contribution to make to development:

*'It's the human resource side of a development programme, which can add value to that programme in different ways.'* (Interview OD9)

*'I think that the best of development is about reciprocity and empowerment... and about relationships. And I think that potentially volunteering has great strengths in relation to those processes.'* (Interview OD7)

*'Development is a process that involves individuals. Before you can affect an organisation or institution you need to work with the individual. And that is where VSO is really best placed because we see ourselves as part of the development process.'* (Interview OD4)

The 'outsider' identity of volunteers was also expressed as important:

*'We have 'international' volunteers ... who [come from] outside the particular cultural context, with a different experience... That 'outsider' role is an important part of what VSO brings.'* (Interview OD6)



There are some common themes of the role of the individual, including individuals who are outsiders, and the importance of relationships that emerge from these statements. These themes were also key elements of the pre-departure volunteer training course 'Volunteers and Development' (V+D). This course is now compulsory for all volunteers, and is seen as an important step in ensuring that volunteers are able to understand their work in the context of a wider development picture. A course that I attended concentrated on volunteers living and working in contexts in which the processes of development and development interventions were likely to touch both their own placements and the lives of colleagues and friends. Volunteers were encouraged to link themselves as individuals with the development issues they would face in their context, both at work and in the communities where they would live. For example, they were asked to consider the impact of development on their professional lives, particularly in a context where their non-volunteer colleagues with regular jobs in the organisation might receive less than the volunteer salaries, and might have several jobs to earn enough income. 'Development' was therefore not presented as something separate from the agents ('out there'), but rather as a set of circumstances that people face in their everyday lives. Reference was also made to everyday lives in the UK (for example, facing the issues of homelessness, poverty, and environmental degradation in the UK). Development was thus presented as something that spans both public and private spheres of a volunteer's role. Volunteers were also seen as part of, not separate from, the development process.

A volunteer's individual relationship with development was also linked to ideas of giving up power, financial reward, and familiar living conditions. This link emphasised the responsibility of volunteers (as representatives from the global 'North') to break down, through their own example, the power inequalities between Northern 'expat' experts, and their Southern colleagues. Volunteers' identity (including their relationship

with the context in which they are placed, and their role as individuals) was therefore seen as a large part of their contribution to VSO's development impact. The VSO placement was thus presented as an opportunity to understand better the processes of development that go on around us in all countries and contexts. This is a view of development that incorporates how individual agents experience development as a set of circumstances in their everyday lives. This is important as it suggests that in order to create the link between the volunteer as the individual development agent and the concept of development, development must be understood as a process in which the agent is involved.

Individual volunteers were also encouraged to see development as something with which they engage throughout their lives, not just during their volunteer placement. The volunteering process was seen as incorporating the experience of volunteers on their return, which might range from a change in their own personal attitudes to active involvement in global education and VSO advocacy campaigns (interview CD3). In this way, the context of volunteering was not restricted to the experience of the volunteer overseas, but also affected the way in which they saw their own context on their return:

*'The placement is ...only one bit of VSO's development agenda. And the volunteer's engagement with development, which can last 20-30 years - the placement is only part of it.'* (Interview CD3)

As this quote illustrates, the impact of volunteers on development was seen as wider than VSO's development programmes. The importance of a volunteer's attitude, and their responsibility to change attitudes of those around them through their example and their relationships continued in the returned volunteer period. Each volunteer might use the experience differently. For some it might be a learning experience that gave them a new perspective that they were able to use during and since their placement, as was the

case for one former volunteer talking about gender:

*'When I first started doing VSO gender was not the sort of thing that I was particularly interested in. But I'm actually much more aware of it through my time at VSO and since I've left as well.'* (Participant 1, GD1)

Volunteering in development can then be seen as a process of becoming a global citizen, with responsibility not just for her/his role in the public economy, but also as a private individual.

I also found different types of volunteering, as well as the traditional two-year North-South professional placement, which seemed to offer a different conception of skill-sharing for development. The South-South volunteering programme for example, offers an alternative view of volunteering, with volunteers recruited from Kenya and the Philippines to serve in existing programmes throughout the world:

*'[A] substantial shift away from the notion that volunteers come with skills from the North to the South... I think it's starting to build a more international view of volunteering and move away from the standard two-year placement of volunteering and into international sharing of skills and experience through all sorts of routes that involve people moving around and working alongside each other.'* (Interview SMT2)

The South-South volunteering programme offers an interesting perspective on the way in which power is integral to VSO's understanding of volunteering, and its role in development processes. Both volunteers and VSO staff interviewed in this research suggested that the power and influence of Northern volunteers was a concern that needed to be addressed by the organisation in its analysis of development, and this was often cited as an argument for not engaging with issues such as gender inequality for

fear of cultural imperialism.

*'It doesn't sit very comfortably alongside [a] commitment to valuing different cultures [if] you're saying we're role-modeling our way of life, because it's better than yours... [But] Ghanaian volunteers working in Ghana [for example] - obviously lots of Ghanaians share a sense that there needs to be development of gender relationships in Ghana, I think challenging those stereotypes could be built into that much more explicitly than it's comfortable to do from the North.'*  
(Interview SMT2)

As this quote from a member of SMT suggests, the Southern volunteers, although still located within power relations of class, caste, ethnicity, sex, age, etc., break out of the North-South stereotype, particularly in the case of national volunteers operating in their own country. This gives a different view of volunteering in context, with volunteers participating in the context of *their own* development, through the principles of international volunteering. Other forms of volunteering (shorter placements, youth volunteering schemes) were similarly seen from some quarters in VSO to be more appropriate in certain contexts, offering the experience of volunteering to a wider spectrum of people, and reaching partner organisations that may not be able to absorb a traditional professional placement.

*'What they need is someone more flexible, more adaptable, and less threatening, more humble, more modest in what they expect to achieve.'* (Interview SMT2)

Thus, volunteering was seen as a flexible contribution to development, based on principles emphasising the recognition of power inequalities and the importance of inter-personal relationships. The 'development' to which volunteers contribute seems to be located within mainstream approaches. But by focusing on how volunteering in

development is conceptualised, I have uncovered a broader set of meanings, which include the private sphere of people's lives. So the relationship between individual development agents and the context of their work was a central concern for both VSO and volunteers, and thus could be seen as a part of the deep structure associated with development and volunteering in VSO.

In the case study that follows I examine in more depth the issues I have raised in this section, demonstrating at the level of a country programme office how VSO has been constrained in its ability to institutionalise gender equality into its programme in the Philippines, and how the study of volunteers and volunteering offers a different perspective from which to view the institutionalisation of gender equality, examining the role of individual *agents*.

### **5.3 The Philippines: a case study**

The VSO-Philippines programme was chosen as a case study for this research because of its experience of running a gender-focused programme (ISWID) (see Chapter 3).

This section examines what can be learned from how ISWID was implemented, its impact on the wider VSO-Philippines programme, and the response of both volunteers and VSO staff.

#### ***5.3.1 Gender equality as a programme issue***

The ISWID programme was VSO's flagship programme on gender equality. It extended over four years, September 1995-September 1999, and included volunteer placements, conferences, training for professional groups, South-South exchanges and grants for local initiatives.

As can be seen by the overall objectives that are quoted below, ISWID was designed to

incorporate gender equality into a framework of activities which reflected an existing understanding of development. However, the Philippines has a community of sophisticated and politically active feminist organisations that directly challenge the efficacy of mainstream development frameworks and approaches in addressing issues of gender inequality. The involvement of some of these organisations and individuals in the programme highlighted some of the limitations of incorporating gender equality into the existing framework of development, and the tensions that existed between what some individuals associated with the programme termed a 'transformative' approach, and the more integrationist approach taken by the programme<sup>68</sup>. Furthermore, the ISWID programme and its follow-up initiative highlighted the tension in the division between volunteers (as individuals) and their work, and the implications of this division for addressing gender inequality in public and private spheres.

### ***5.3.2 Integrated Skills for Women in Development (ISWID)***

The main objectives of the ISWID programme show how addressing gender inequality was understood as a part of an already existing set of activities. The objectives also suggest that the reason a gender analysis had been missing from the existing development framework is because of a lack of data on women and the skills and tools with which to integrate this information:

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<sup>68</sup> This tension was often expressed in the context of the Philippines as being between 'feminist' work which seeks to transform the basis on which development work is conceptualised, and 'gender' work which seeks to incorporate principles of equality into existing frameworks, often with the end-goal of transforming the frameworks from the inside (interview PHIL10). This reflects a tension between radical and liberal approaches to addressing gender inequality in development (Jackson and Pearson 1998, Porter and Judd 1999, Miller and Razavi 1998, and contributors such as Smyth and Williams in Porter et al. 1999). The terms 'feminist' and 'gender' as used in the Philippines do not necessarily point to the political credentials of the people who espouse these different approaches. There are many who describe

- *'To strengthen the ability of NGOs to increase gender awareness, and achieve greater inclusion of women within mainstream development activities.'*
- *'To contribute to the gathering and assessment of data on a range of socio-economic issues relating to women.'*
- *'For volunteers to fill identified skill gaps and transfer skills in order to improve the long-term effectiveness of those organisations.'*

*(VSO Philippines 2000a)*

To gain a knowledge of 'tools' and to 'mainstream' gender issues into their work was documented as volunteers' main concern throughout ISWID (VSO Philippines 2000a and b, and interview PHIL3), but applying these tools and strategies to implement gender analysis remained a challenge. Despite this, an evaluation of ISWID (VSO Philippines 2000a) gave the programme credit for achieving its objectives, in so far as they went. The recommendations of the ISWID evaluation however went on to include suggestions for institutionalising gender equality into VSO's work, including gender training for all volunteers both pre-departure and in-country, using the expertise of women's organisations as a pool of resource people in the Philippines.

Recommendations also suggested increasing the capacity and duration of VSO staff to support 'gender volunteers', and ensure that employer organisations were able to absorb and own any process of change; and to include gender analysis in the general VSO-volunteer reporting procedures (VSO Philippines 2000a). These recommendations represent the idea of 'mainstreaming' as it was understood in VSO, ensuring that gender analysis becomes a part of how the organisation understands and carries out its work in development. However, gender sensitivity training for all new staff and for all new

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themselves as feminists involved in 'gender work' – myself included.

volunteers was the only part of these recommendations to be implemented. Although the training was seen as useful by respondents interviewed in VSO Philippines, there is much research to suggest that gender training is not generally successful as a stand-alone strategy, as it can only have impact if it is carried out as part of a wider organisational strategy of change<sup>69</sup>. The other recommendations on the institutionalisation of gender were not absorbed into the wider VSO Philippines country programme, so there was little chance of real changes in terms of the way in which their work was developed and run.

In contrast, recommendations on the overall management of ISWID (i.e. elements of running the programme, not specifically associated with gender analysis) were picked up and implemented by other separately funded VSO Philippines programmes (for example, Skills for Community-based Resource Utilization and Management (SCRUM) and Sharing and Promotion of Awareness and Regional Knowledge (SPARK), both natural resource management programmes), which developed the different elements more fully (interview PHIL3 and interview PHIL4). But this was not the case for all its elements. A particularly effective component of ISWID was the 'Self Evaluation Instrument'<sup>70</sup>. This is a participatory tool designed to assess how well an organisation has integrated gender concerns into its work and into the organisation itself. According to one ISWID volunteer, the participatory nature of the tool was effective in enabling her employer organisation to explore and assess the different elements raised in the questions (interview PHIL1). VSO Philippines also used this tool to assess its own progress on gender-related objectives, providing a useful forum in which to discuss the issues and explore areas for improvement as part of the institutionalisation of gender

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<sup>69</sup> See for example, Porter and Smyth, 1998

<sup>70</sup> A list of detailed multiple-choice questions, with different 'scores' for the different answers. At the end there is a 'score chart' which sums up the level to which the organisation has integrated gender concerns.



equality within VSO Philippines. However, the tool was not used more generally to assess other placements, nor was it transferred to the other VSO Philippines programmes (interview PHIL3 and interview PHIL4). Although the 'self-evaluation instrument' itself may not hold the key to institutionalising a gender analysis, it did offer a way to evaluate development work more from a gender perspective in a way that other tools such as the Logical Framework did not.

One of the key aims of ISWID was to create a means through which ISWID volunteers could have an impact outside of the programme:

*'[O]ne of the gains of adopting ISWID as one of the main programmes managed directly by VSO Philippines is that it influenced non-ISWID volunteers and employers into undertaking gender-sensitivity training and related activities, thereby raising their awareness on the issue. This is a very significant achievement considering the strong initial resistance of most of the non-ISWID male-dominated employers, and the seeming initial indifference and apathy of many of the volunteers.'* (VSO Philippines 2000a).

As this quote suggests, ISWID did promote the integration of gender analysis into some placements located outside the specific gender programme. However, this success was not across the board. There was resistance from some employers, and according to the evaluation documents, even some ISWID employers (particularly those employing volunteers to address gender equality as well as other skills areas) were not committed to the success of the gender equality elements of the placements. This led to problems for the volunteers, who felt pressure to concentrate their efforts on the other issues, to the neglect of their work on gender equality (VSO Philippines 2000a). It seems that in these cases, integrating gender analysis only went as far as it could 'fit' into the existing set of activities within the framework of development.

The language of the ISWID documentation emphasised an in-depth and sophisticated gender analysis, incorporating a strong, political, feminist perspective on the integration of gender equality into development work and organisations, as well as more technical and practical concerns around implementing gender analysis. For example, the report of the VSO-Philippines 'National Conference on Gender and Development Work: Concepts, Tools and Strategies', contains papers from Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM)-focused organisations. These papers also prioritised working with women, feminist research and organising practice:

*'The efforts to integrate gender work in CBCRM includes learning, unlearning and searching for innovative approaches on how to translate gender fairness principles to concrete actions. However, gender and development integration goes beyond forming gender sensitive policies, systems and processes in the institution. It also calls for the personal commitment of staff to implement and practise gender fairness in their work and personal lives, so that gender integration in the institutional policies, structures, systems, activities, resources and people has an impact. What is in the mind and in the heart have to meet each other, only then can the implementers fully realise what gender fairness is in CBCRM.'* (Noemi C. Sol in VSO Philippines 2000b).

VSO did attempt to continue learning from the links with the women's movement in the Philippines, beyond ISWID. According to one women's organisation, they and others were consulted about the development of the ISWID follow-up programme (interview PHIL10). The fact that many of the organisations with whom VSO cooperated during ISWID took uncompromising lines on the organisational changes needed in order to address gender equality seriously (interview PHIL10), suggests that VSO Philippines did attempt this task seriously.

However, although ISWID put much emphasis on VSO's own organisational capacity to integrate gender equality, it seems that gender equality remained located within gender placements, and the implications for organisational change were limited to partner organisations, and not used to scrutinise VSO as an organisation, nor its relationship with its volunteers. For example, one conference paper in the report of the 'National Conference on Gender and Development Work' (VSO Philippines 2000b) concerned a VSO volunteer's own experience, but it did not address her experience with VSO as an organisation, or the relationship that developed between VSO and her employer organisation through their collaboration on gender placements. In other words, the gender analysis maintained the division between development work, the organisation and the development agents carrying out that work.

ISWID's proposed follow-up programme, 'MAGIC'<sup>71</sup>, moved away from working with the Philippines women's movement and feminist organisations, towards placing volunteers in more grassroots NGOs, which were seen to fit more into the context of what the respondents understood as development (interview PHIL6). The choice of volunteers and their employer organisations was therefore based on the mainstream understanding of development adopted by VSO Philippines. This was seen as a natural progression for VSO's work on gender equality, from working with the Manila-based, middle-class women's movement towards working with more marginalised women, who were compatible with the development agenda adopted by VSO Philippines (interview PHIL6). MAGIC also concentrated on the volunteers' professional role:

*'By becoming less 'radical' the programme [has been] able to concentrate on mainstreaming gender into their [the volunteers'] work.'* (Interview PHIL6)

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<sup>71</sup> MAGIC has since been cancelled, having failed to get the necessary funding.

However, this reinforced the idea that gender equality should be incorporated at the level of the placement and was the responsibility of volunteers and their employers, rather than something that VSO considered as part of its own organisational understanding of working in development, through volunteers.

After ISWID, VSO continued to place volunteers in the Philippines under the umbrella of a 'gender programme'. These were generally in counselling or psycho-social development posts, and placements with women's organisations. However, there were problems with integrating these gender placements into the mainstream of the VSO Philippines country programme. For example, reporting different 'types' of volunteer work within standard reporting procedures led to problems because the evaluation of counselling work might value different factors from technical work on conserving river resources. Furthermore, within VSO Philippines the volunteers in the gender programme felt isolated because they felt that their work didn't 'fit' (interview PHIL5).

There were additional problems associated with the gender programme's links with the women's movement. The difficulties of working with the women's movement were compared unfavourably to the relative ease with which VSO collaborated with grass-roots CBNRM organisations. For example, feminist collaborators tended to demand high honoraria for their work, justifying their cost by the fact that feminist work had been under-valued for so long. However much this might have been true, it contributed to the alienation of the gender programme within VSO Philippines, when compared to collaborators within the CBNRM movement who did not demand such high payments, and were therefore seen as 'easier' partners (interview PHIL3).

Thus the ISWID programme and the continuing gender programme only achieved limited integration into the overall VSO Philippines country programme. The

integration of gender analysis only succeeded in so far as it was able to fit the goal of gender equality into the existing framework of development work. Efforts to make more radical changes to the overall country programme in order to address gender issues better in the future largely failed.

### ***5.3.3 Gender equality, programmes, and people***

Respondents who had been associated with the ISWID programme in the Philippines made the point that an organisation cannot integrate gender into its work successfully before it has addressed the same issues in its own organisational context (interviews PHIL2 and PHIL3)<sup>72</sup>. In the context of VSO this includes the individuals who are the development agents. An understanding of gender equality in volunteering suggests a more permeable boundary between the organisation and its work, and the development agents themselves. As gendered individuals, volunteers have an impact on their placement through the relationships that they form. They are dealing with and influencing a local context, whether or not they are aware of such dynamics. This personal relationship with the placement context was one of the central messages of what it means to be a volunteer, put forward in the pre-departure training courses mentioned above (observation notes PO2 and PO4). By their behaviour and their presence in a situation, volunteers are able either to promote or undermine ideas of gender equality (interview PHIL1). This was also brought out in an interview with a VSO Philippines staff member:

*'[T]he male volunteers by their example ... [can] support [or undermine] the gender programme. If you have a marine biologist who used dynamite at the weekend to catch their fish, they're undermining [the Natural Resource Management programme].'* (Interview PHIL6)

From this perspective, it was in VSO's interests to ensure that its volunteers (the visible face of VSO in the placement communities) did not behave inappropriately. An example that was often raised in the context of the Philippines country programme, was if a male volunteer used the services of a prostituted woman. Prostitution is illegal in the Philippines and volunteers would therefore be breaking the law. But there was also an extra dimension to this behaviour, as the VSO Philippines gender programme had placements with organisations working with women who had survived abuse, some having been forced to work as prostitutes<sup>73</sup>. For a volunteer to visit a prostitute could therefore be seen as undermining the objectives of the gender programme.

Although many of the volunteers taking part in my research appreciated that their behaviour and attitudes could support or undermine programme objectives, making this link more directly led to considerable resistance on the part of volunteers. Volunteers expressed the need for technical tools, strategies and support to deal with gender

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<sup>72</sup> This reflects the analysis of, for example, Goetz, 1997 and Rao, Stuart and Kelleher, 1999

<sup>73</sup> For many people who write or work on the subject, prostitution is a legitimate livelihood activity, in which women sex workers are seen as active resisters of social, economic and legal structures which force them to work in illegitimate and often also dangerous conditions. Forced prostitution is seen as the systematic sexual abuse of women, and many analysts maintain that the clients and those engaged in coercion should be targeted by policies, not the sex workers themselves (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998). This thesis makes no attempt to engage in or resolve these and many other complex issues associated with sex work. The example here points out that the programme had a particular relationship with the issue, which involves working with women survivors of violence, many of whom had been forced into prostitution through economic or physical violence. This means that the programme's engagement saw forced prostitution as a type of male violence against women, and male volunteers engaging with prostitutes (when they could not know whether or not the woman had been forced) could then be seen as condoning this violence. This does not reject the need to protect the livelihoods of sex workers, perhaps through future work, but at the time of my fieldwork, this was not the programme's engagement.

inequality in their work and in the context in which they live. But some VSO Philippines staff and volunteers involved in the gender programme felt that although volunteers consistently requested tools and strategies to integrate gender equality into their work, it was not a route for ignoring their own identities and behaviour (observation notes PO1). A VSO Philippines gender training session for new volunteers attempted to address the core issues of volunteers' identity and power. However, the very word 'gender' became a trigger for adverse reaction amongst some volunteers:

*'This should have been women's issues, not gender, as it never really identified problems of men; needs a balance. This should have been targeted to gender-only placements, as it seemed to deal with gender assessments that couldn't be done hand in hand with a volunteer placement. ...*

*'What exactly is [VSOP] trying to achieve? For many placements gender awareness is a very small part of our work, when experience, natural concern for human rights and common decency etc. gives us sufficient awareness. ...*

*'Sub-heading for the next course MUST include something like 'Women's Issues in our Workplaces' otherwise we get hung up on the meaning of 'gender'.*

*Volunteers should be aware of the content.'* (VSO Philippines ND).

As these feedback comments from participants at the session show, addressing issues of gender inequality at a more personal level caused conflict, and this led to a breakdown in communication and learning on gender equality, and to considerable tensions.

Addressing gender relations on a personal level takes people out of their normal 'comfort zone' and forces them to confront difficult and sometimes threatening issues.

In subsequent interviews, volunteers confirmed the tension between using practical tools to integrate gender equality into their work, and addressing gender equality as a

wider issue on which they have an impact through their relationships as individuals. One participant was keen to engage with gender issues, but only as an element of what he understood to be development work. This did not include what he terms 'gender ... in the political arena' (email interview PHIL13), in other words, the feminist approach taken by some of the trainers, which emphasised volunteers' personal lives and relationships, although it did include the more practical elements of addressing gender equality in placement work ('gender and development'):

*'Many of the gender workshops that we have attended tend to talk more about gender as in the political arena as opposed to purely in development (which of course is political but not in the same way)... Is this the way that VSO wants to go and should be going? As volunteers, especially not as specialists, the most we can probably do without causing offence is by ...trying to be inclusive or by discussing the issues with colleagues. I know from my own experience any more than this would not be generally appreciated. Also, it must be questioned [whether] foreigners should be doing this, especially when capacity already exists within the country? Specialist volunteers could support this if VSO wants volunteers to move into advocacy... At present gender and development is hopelessly underrepresented within the gender workshops.'* (Email interview PHIL13).

Another participant saw critical engagement with gender issues on any level from outside as inappropriate:

*'I analyse gender issues in terms of cultural appropriation... I think VSO and volunteers should fit into the country's own gender programme, rather than trying to impose their own programme on the Philippines. I think nobody from the outside has a right to tell people how to live or how to change.'* (Email



But at the same time as resisting acknowledgement of their own identity and power in terms of gender relations, volunteers in the Philippines responding to this study indicated that the crossover between public and private was informally understood in the context of volunteers as role models. For example, this volunteer did not like to think of himself as a 'gendered identity', but nevertheless found that as part of a couple he felt the need to challenge local stereotypes and present alternative versions of behaviour:

*'Normally I don't tend to think of gender in terms of a personal sense of identity ...[But] the idea that men can do housework and women can have a relaxing evening is something that maybe we can help change attitudes about.'* (Email interview PHIL13)

One volunteer commented that volunteers are role models whether they like it or not, because their behaviour at home, socially and at work is scrutinised so much by friends, colleagues and local communities (participant 2, GD1). Ideas of what constitutes public and private vary greatly between contexts (Oakley 1972, Rosaldo 1974, Ortner 1974, Mackintosh 1981). With many volunteers coming from a context in which private space is deemed important to an individual, volunteers felt that they were viewed as 'public figures', which is something that they were unused to, and a loss of privacy was mentioned as a common challenge of volunteering (observation notes, PO3). Many of these volunteers felt that to try to explore the impact of this side of their identities added to the pressures, but others used their personal identities to develop further their relationship with the local community, and their understanding of the situation of women within that context. For the following volunteer in the Philippines, her identity and how that might be understood in the context was central to her understanding of her

own role as a volunteer:

*'My identity as a woman here in the Philippines is seen largely in terms of my potential to be a wife and a mother and to be sexy (but not sexual). I feel that as a foreigner I can to some extent over-ride this with my 'otherness'. To act as I would at home in relation to alcohol, friendships with men, pride in my sexuality is curbed by my respect for the culture in which I am now living.'* (Email interview PHIL12)

Another volunteer, for whom gender equality was a relatively new issue, found her understanding of gender issues enhanced by her own experience of life as a 'housewife' (previous to being selected in-country as a VSO volunteer):

*'I have developed a greater understanding [of] women confined to household roles for various reasons, and those seeking to work outside of their home.'* (Email interview PHIL14)

Thus, as well as being embedded in the deep structure of VSO, the cross-over between an individual volunteer's public role (in their placement) and their private life was clearly felt, and was important to the experience of individual volunteers. However, volunteer resistance to addressing the personal elements of gender relations (whether this is specific to raising the issue of gender relations, or whether this is a more common reaction to training that challenges elements of individual identity) constrained attempts to address gender inequality in the relations of individual development agents in the Philippines.

#### **5.3.4 Conclusions from the Philippines**

When I set out to do fieldwork in the Philippines, the idea was to look at how VSO

Philippines had learned from ISWID, and what were the constraints to incorporating the lessons from ISWID into the wider VSO Philippines country programme. According to some of the respondents in the Philippines, the lack of structures and mechanisms through which to channel learning on gender equality in the Philippines was primarily due to the way in which VSO as a wider organisation is structured. Whilst there have been some attempts to incorporate a gender analysis within VSO in the Philippines and elsewhere, they were working within a structure of the larger organisation which was struggling with how to institutionalise gender equality in different ways and at different levels. In studying the VSO Philippines country programme it seemed that how gender equality was understood and gender analysis implemented through volunteer placements was limited by the organisational need to adhere to mainstream development priorities, and therefore dependent upon individual volunteer or employer organisation commitment.

However, the insights I gained from this case study, as I have set out in this chapter, also led me to another conclusion: that the understanding of development in VSO Philippines was also limited in its ability to engage with gender equality because of its disengagement from development agents. This conclusion reflects some of the ideas expressed by writers on gender and development such as Goetz (1997), who have highlighted the importance of understanding gender relations as an element of the relationship between the organisation and its employees. The issues raised by volunteers build on this analysis by allowing an examination of not only the organisation's relationship with its agents, but also the relationship that development agents have with the context in which they live and work – both as individuals, and as representatives of the organisation. Thus the institutionalisation of gender equality can be understood on two levels within VSO: first as an organisation through its own policies and procedures governing staff and programme development; second as a volunteer-sending

organisation through the identity and behaviour of volunteers that is promoted and encouraged through its relationship with them.

## **5.4 Conclusion to Chapter 5: focus on individuals**

Before my fieldwork in the Philippines, I had assumed that gender equality would be more effectively addressed if it could be thoroughly incorporated into the understanding of development, perhaps working to bring about change in the framework of development from within the organisation<sup>74</sup>. However, insights from volunteers and VSO staff in the Philippines challenged my own assumptions, and I realised that I would need to think more about the deep structure of VSO, not just in relation to the incorporation of gender equality into development work, but also in relation to the opportunities and constraints presented by volunteering. Volunteers as individuals can actively support or undermine gender programmes by their perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. But there are no structures or mechanisms through which VSO can engage with volunteers about their role in this respect. Because responsibility for gender analysis is located in the programmes, in volunteer placements and their employer organisations, it is difficult for VSO to institutionalise gender equality into all aspects of its work, particularly in its relationship with volunteers.

The next chapter continues and extends the focus on volunteers as individual development agents, examining the role of individuals in VSO's deep structure, in its construction of volunteering in development, and in the relationship between VSO and volunteers.

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<sup>74</sup> This reflects the idea of 'double loop learning' as theorised by Argyris and Schön (1996). See Chapter 7 for a discussion of organisational learning in this thesis.

## Chapter 6: Volunteering and gender equality

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I turn to a discussion of gender equality in volunteering. I build on the analysis of the agency of individual volunteers introduced in Chapter 5, and go on to discuss the relationship between individual agents and the organisation. The discussion of how gender equality is understood in volunteering in development is thus extended to address the next part of my research question: How is knowledge and understanding of gender equality negotiated in the relationship between VSO and volunteers?

Volunteering can be understood in the context of development in different ways: development through volunteers, development by volunteers, and development of volunteers (after Mohan 2002; see also Chapter 2). These understandings emphasise the role of the individual agent and identify the different levels on which s/he engages with the context in which s/he is working. However, although the role of the agent is central, this chapter explores the tension that appeared in my research between unequal gender relations understood as an issue to be addressed in development through and by volunteers, and gender relations built into an understanding of development *of* volunteers.

Furthermore, this chapter explores a VSO construction of volunteering, also uncovered by my research, that promotes an ideal type of volunteer, which maintains divisions between the private and public spheres. The construction of volunteering, embedded in the deep structure of VSO, emphasises the professional role of volunteers in the public sphere, as their major contribution to VSO's development objectives. Thus the private behaviour of volunteers is excluded. However, the discourse of the ideal type of volunteer did not appear to be imposed by VSO on volunteers, but rather is negotiated

and agreed (both explicitly and tacitly) between volunteers and VSO. I argue that this discursive relationship means that the ideal type of volunteer can be challenged by other volunteers.

Relationships of power are central to the volunteer experience, and in previous chapters I have discussed how a volunteer is expected to engage with these in both public and private spheres. However, in this chapter I argue that the gender relations of individuals are excluded from the understanding of power in the volunteer role. Volunteers are, however, individuals, encountering gender relations in every part of both their public and private lives. For many volunteers, this forms a central element of their experience. In this chapter I build on the role of individual values in volunteering and alternative ideas of power outlined in Chapter 2, in order to discuss how, as active agents, volunteers are in a dynamic relationship with VSO. My research found that the dynamics of this relationship potentially offer an opportunity for volunteers to renegotiate how gender equality is understood and incorporated into volunteering for development. In the following section, I analyse the different assumptions about volunteering and development, and in Section 6.3 I examine the nature of power in the relationship between volunteers and VSO and ways that power is negotiated.

## **6.2 Assumptions in volunteering and development**

In this section I investigate how the VSO construction of volunteering contains gendered assumptions, and how these assumptions are contained within the idea of an ideal type of volunteer, which is embedded in the deep structure of the organisation. I first examine how the VSO construction of development, although implying volunteer engagement in the private sphere (see Chapter 5), excludes a recognition of volunteers' gender relations in the private sphere. I then go on to examine how the ideal type of

volunteer has gendered characteristics, which reflect embedded assumptions of gender roles and relations, and reinforce the division between the public and private spheres. However, as assumptions contained in the notion of volunteering for development are constructed, I suggest that these can also be challenged and changed.

### ***6.2.1 The private sphere in development through, by and of volunteers***

VSO's development policies and programmes are carried out 'through' volunteers. This understanding of development includes the role of volunteers as agents, acting as the vehicle through which an overall strategy is carried out. At a different level, the work that a volunteer does (the placement) can be seen as development 'by' volunteers. This also acknowledges the role of the agent, and getting the right volunteer is seen as central to the success of the placement and therefore to VSO's programme work. However, on both these levels, the role of volunteers as agents is confined to the public sphere of their placement. VSO also encourages volunteers to see development in terms of themselves as individual volunteers operating in the context of poverty and disadvantage and their responsibility (individually) to exhibit certain behaviours throughout their time in placement, and afterwards as global citizens. But as the reactions of the volunteers in the Philippines in the last chapter demonstrated, gender equality was only acknowledged as part of volunteers' work, and therefore was understood as a public development issue, rather than a volunteering issue, spanning both public and private spheres. Addressing gender relations was thus disassociated from volunteers' personal engagement with the context.

This disassociation begins right from the beginning of a volunteer's engagement with VSO. For example, volunteers at the pre-departure Volunteers and Development (V+D)<sup>75</sup> weekend were given an overall introduction to some of the major issues of

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<sup>75</sup> This course has recently become compulsory, although 80-85% of volunteers were already attending it

development, including structural adjustment and debt, globalisation, and community development. My observation of this weekend<sup>76</sup> was revealing for both what was said by VSO trainers and discussed by the participants with respect to gender, and what was not said and discussed. As a development issue, it was not presented in the context of VSO organisational priorities (development through volunteers), but rather in the context of an issue of special interest to some volunteers in their placements. Gender equality was located within the wider development context as a 'development issue' (alongside HIV and the environment), and presented as part of a volunteer's contribution to development work (development by volunteers). The discussion of gender issues emphasised similarities with the UK context in terms of the problems facing women, but was limited by the sense that these were problems with no possible solutions. The idea that women's movements who are addressing these issues exist in all countries in which they might be placed came as a surprise to the participants. This can be contrasted with the issue of HIV/AIDS, which had the benefit of a separately funded regional VSO programme in Southern Africa (RAISA) and an organisation-wide national and international campaign. HIV/AIDs is seen as a problem that volunteers could tackle in the South, with solutions linked to VSO and its programmes (development through volunteers).

Once in placement, the VSO country programme offices regard volunteers as part of a wider programme of development work (development through volunteers), and volunteers are identified almost entirely by the 'hard' skills they bring to the placement (development by volunteers). The volunteer's professional identity forms the basis for both their day-to-day work with their employer organisation, for their reporting to VSO,

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(Oliver, training department).

<sup>76</sup> The V+D course was also discussed in Chapter 5, with regard to the relationship between volunteering and development.



and for their engagement with training workshops or other VSO programmatic activities. This is the time when a volunteer's engagement with development and volunteering - whether associated as a part of VSO's wider programme or not - comes alive. Thus during the placement, a volunteer's work or professional contribution is the central element of her or his role, and it is in this context that gender equality forms a part of their professional engagement, and a part of their understanding of development.

However, private behaviour is also present implicitly in the VSO construction of volunteering in development. As I discussed in Chapter 5, during my observation of pre-departure volunteer training courses, I noted that volunteers were encouraged to see development as a situation with which they have contact in their everyday lives, not just in their professional role. In interviews, VSO staff also recognised that volunteers are faced with their own and others' gender interests, even though their placements may not be designed to address them, and the volunteers thus have an impact informally (interview OD10)<sup>77</sup>. The monitoring and evaluation methodology of 'Significant Change' (which I discuss further in Chapter 7) attempts to capture volunteer experience both in their professional and private lives, by asking volunteers to record any significant change that has happened, and to try to identify their role in bringing about this change. This has enabled volunteers to express their impact, outside of the structure of the placement objectives. A hypothetical example quoted to me by staff involved in implementing the 'Significant Change' methodology, was of a volunteer teacher, who might find that in day-to-day interactions with the community in which s/he was living, s/he had the opportunity to communicate with a family who might not previously have allowed their daughter to attend school. By talking through the reasons for their reluctance, and perhaps helping them to find solutions to the constraints, s/he might

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<sup>77</sup> See also Porter, F 1999 for an overview of how volunteers have encountered gender issues, both in their placement contexts and in their everyday lives.

contribute to this family's eventual decision to let their daughter attend school.

However, although the method has enabled volunteers to document gender issues as an element of their volunteering experiences, VSO has not been able to absorb these examples within its strategic thinking as a development organisation:

*'I think we are as an organisation actually meddling in, or doing a lot on gender issues in [for example] education, but we're not actually tapping into that as an organisation. The volunteers feel that they're getting involved in gender issues and that isn't feeding into our thinking in terms of Country Strategic Plans (CSPs), and our recognition in terms of the centre.'* (Interview OD10)

Another way in which private behaviour generally and gendered behaviour specifically might emerge (albeit incoherently) in volunteering, is through attempts by both country programme offices and recruitment division to identify placements and select volunteers on the basis of 'soft skills' (a volunteer's personal dimensions), rather than the professional qualifications and experience (or hard skills). Rockliffe (2001) notes that the personal characteristics and attitudes of volunteers 'are as important as their technical expertise in promoting significant change' (p. 2), while one respondent commented:

*'Volunteer selection involves quite a lot of soft skills. In some ways many of those soft skills are intrinsically gendered - they're about listening, they're about consideration, they're about fairness, they're about equality, they're about recognising power, they're about respect, they're about non-exploitation... Built into [training] are certain values, which up to a point are gendered. And in country training where you are talking about cultural sensitivity and the ability to adapt at work. And in some instances a more specific area about*

*relationships within the society... I'm just trying to say that there are elements to it, but to pretend that there is a coherence to all these strands I think is going a bit too far.'* (Interview OD9).

This comment indicates that there is an appreciation among some VSO staff of the potential of volunteering to address gender equality, outside of the development objectives of their placement – in other words, gender equality could form a part of development 'of' volunteers.

But there are challenges to integrating this approach more formally into an understanding of volunteer identity and behaviour, as was illustrated by the response to gender training from the VSO-Philippines volunteers discussed in Chapter 5. This was confirmed by a broader selection of volunteers at the RV weekend, when a (self-selected) group of returned volunteers attended a discussion held by me. One of the scenarios that I had developed as a basis for the group discussion involved a feminist trainer who, by addressing gender issues in the context of the volunteers' private lives, alienated half of the participants (with the other half glad that someone had raised the problems). I had deliberately made the trainer a feminist, to challenge the construction of gender equality as an issue confined to the public sphere of development 'by' volunteers. However, the volunteers discussing the scenario identified the feminist nature of the training and the trainer as the source of the problem:

*'The idea that it was a feminist leading this immediately sets up problems, not just with the male volunteers, but with the female volunteers as well... It was focusing on volunteer behaviour which... [made] people feel defensive. We felt it should be focusing on the cultural context of the country and the volunteers' role within that and how to deal with gender issues which arose in that particular country... We felt that the facilitator should at least be perceived to be neutral.'*

This participant's comment suggests considerable tension when the ideas of gender equality start to cross boundaries between volunteers' public/professional role and their private/personal life. This was confirmed by the experiences of VSO staff in other contexts:

*'We ran a gender session... it didn't go well. We changed it so many times. You would get men, especially, who were really threatened by it. And ... having exposed all of that suddenly it was very raw, yet you couldn't deal with it. So what we did was [address volunteer identities] in combination with revealing the gender inequity in the [context] ... and they enjoyed that. They thought that was great because that transferred it.'* (Interview OD4)

Thus, although it is widely accepted within VSO that gender relations are part of the broader identity and role of a volunteer, including a volunteer's attitudes and behaviours in both public and private, official confirmation of this notion is still resisted. This indicates a powerful tension in the understanding of where and to what extent it is appropriate to address gender inequality, and what it might involve.

### **6.2.2 The ideal type of volunteer**

In order to investigate the tensions in addressing gender equality in volunteering and development, the more hidden assumptions associated with volunteering in VSO need to be examined. A clear difference between VSO and other development organisations is that VSO is not able to 'impose' restrictions or limitations on volunteers in the same way as in a regular contractual relationship with employees. I suggest that volunteering has a 'value system' within which what it means to be a volunteer is negotiated between VSO and volunteers. This process creates an image of the ideal volunteer, which in this

thesis I have termed an 'ideal type' to indicate that this image is not necessarily a reality, but something against which volunteers can be assessed. In order to uncover this ideal type of volunteer I investigated hidden assumptions with both volunteers and staff, by using scenarios in a series of group discussions<sup>78</sup>.

When volunteers are being selected, their suitability is assessed against what are called the seven recruitment 'dimensions' of self-assurance, a flair for solving problems, adaptability, the ability to work in a team, sensitivity to the needs of others, a desire to learn, and a commitment to learn from others. These are used as a set of standards in the construction of a volunteer identity and behaviour. In a group discussion with placement advisors and regional support officers<sup>79</sup>, I tested how these dimensions (or soft skills) were interpreted in terms of assumptions of behaviour, and what is considered normal in a particular situation. The group debated two scenarios: one involved a feminist selected volunteer objecting to the behaviour of male volunteers at a pre-departure training weekend; the other involved an alleged case of harassment by a confident male candidate of a quieter female candidate at a selection day. Although not able to pass judgment on cases on which full information was not available, it was apparent that the behaviour of the volunteers was evaluated against the seven recruitment dimensions based on the assumption that certain behaviours fitted better within these dimensions than others. The general feeling was that the feminist volunteer, in holding strong,

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<sup>78</sup> The groups were of returned volunteers (a group from the Philippines, and a group of returned volunteers from various countries who were attending an RV weekend); Regional Programme Managers (senior managers from the overseas division); and a group consisting of Placement Advisors and Regional Programme Assistants. These different groups gave the opportunity for me to compare and triangulate responses to some of the issues I was testing. I used the 'feminist' label in several different scenarios to indicate a commitment to challenging gendered norms and practices.

<sup>79</sup> See Appendices 1 and 2 for the dates and list of group discussion participants.

'political' views, would not make a successful volunteer. One participant noted:

*'[S]he's not being very flexible or open-minded. She's not taking into account that she's more than likely going to be living somewhere where the cultural norms are completely different ... she seems very rigid... She's not displaying a very positive and realistic commitment to VSO, she's not very sensitive or flexible... so it would be a serious selection issue.'* (Participant 1, GD3)

This can be contrasted with reaction to a potential male volunteer who, in another scenario, is alleged to have made sexist comments/jokes to a female potential volunteer. Despite some concerns about his potential for abuse of power in his private relationships with less powerful women, the general feeling was that this would not stop him from being a volunteer:

*'[H]e might have been genuinely trying to sort of bring her out of her shell, and his way is by bantering in obviously not an acceptable way for her... I don't know if they would even re-interview. Maybe it would be a strong note of concern on his file and on her's to see if it repeats.'* (Participant 2, GD3)

So, according to the group discussing the scenarios, the confident male volunteer would have been considered a slight concern, but not so much as to question his selection, whereas the feminist volunteer would probably have undergone a selection review, based on her 'inflexibility' and inability to adapt to cultures that she might consider sexist. Although the seven dimensions justified these judgments, assumptions of an ideal type of volunteer emerged that appeared to contain norms about appropriate behaviours for men and women.

In a separate discussion with overseas division managers based in London, I used a scenario that involved a feminist volunteer who clashed with the leadership of her

employer organisation when she tried to implement a gender equality strategy involving organisational as well as programmatic changes. The discussion revealed an assumption by managers that a feminist volunteer would carry personal characteristics that might undermine the position of VSO in a particular context. One participant said:

*'[I]t [the word 'feminist'] did jump out to me ... particularly the identification of western feminist. That brings out a lot of issues of cultural sensitivity. You expect these from many volunteers, but you would expect to some extent that might be more problematic for a feminist, based on western principles of feminism. That automatically for me would throw up warning signs about imposing a western dominated paradigm into the situation.'* (Participant 1, GD2)

Members of the group who regarded the feminist volunteer as potentially damaging cited her 'political' motivations. But others accepted the political nature of development work, and of the context from which many volunteers come:

*'All volunteers come with political views, whether we like it or not really. That's what makes us want to go into development perhaps as well.'* (Participant 2, GD2)

It seemed that, in terms of the ideal type of volunteer, only certain kinds of political motivation were acceptable. When presented with scenarios addressing the private sphere behaviour and values of volunteers, most respondents amongst the senior managers perceived individual volunteers' relationships with others as an important part of the volunteer value system, in their private lives, encapsulated in the following comment:

*'We used to make it very clear to volunteers during in-country training that their*

*private life had everything to do with us... Primarily because their private life could bring the reputation of the organisation into question... So VSO or the programme office have every right to intervene in your private life if the organisation deems that it's bringing the reputation of the organisation into question.' (Participant 3, GD2)*

Although this quote suggests that VSO does recognise the impact of volunteers outside of the public sphere of their placement, the majority of respondents I engaged with during my fieldwork in London, both in interviews and in group discussions, also acknowledged that in terms of gender relations, this was an area where VSO had not been able to develop any coherent principles:

*'What I don't think has happened at all is any kind of understanding that individuals themselves might have to examine their own values and attitudes and responses to gender, nor any kind of directive approach to VSO's goals on gender, what VSO's ways of working might be on gender... it still doesn't get at that stuff about me and my relationship to others.' (Interview CD2)*

Thus although personal values and identity are deemed important for the ideal type of volunteer, they are difficult to pin down when it comes to an understanding of gender equality. This difficulty highlights the challenge of institutionalising gender equality into VSO's construction of volunteering in development, and into VSO's organisational deep structure.

But the ideal type of volunteer is not a VSO invention to be imposed on volunteers. The pre-departure period was often described during the course of my research as 'hand-holding', with the objective to get as many appropriately selected, trained and matched volunteers out to their placements as possible. This is a period of intense engagement of



volunteers with the recruitment and training departments of VSO. Throughout this period an ideal volunteer identity and role are constructed, and volunteer expectations are 'managed':

*'As people move through the whole system, from a basic awareness...to building that relationship with VSO...what we aim to do is enhance people's understanding of what we're about.'* (Interview CD4)

As VSO selects volunteers, and controls which placements they are offered, this nominally assigns a power to the organisation over volunteers, which is constructed and maintained through relationships with placement advisors and training personnel<sup>80</sup>. For example, volunteers are discouraged from being too fussy about where they are placed, as this is deemed contrary to the norms of volunteering set up between VSO and volunteers.

However in my observation of the pre-departure training course, I noted that when asked about their interaction with VSO placement advisors, volunteers indicated that for them, it was a question of getting the best deal available in terms of where they went and what they did. They knew what kind of person they were supposed to be (the 'ideal' volunteer), and having been selected they were confident that they could fit the mould for the purposes of getting out to their placement (observation notes, PO2). Placement advisors, in recorded group discussions, also acknowledged that volunteers routinely withheld information from them, for example regarding relationships they might be developing in the pre-departure period. It seems that, to some extent, both sides were playing a game. Both groups of people seemed aware that the pre-departure process is

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<sup>80</sup> Trainers themselves are not VSO staff members. They are often returned volunteers, which might perpetuate the image of an ideal type of volunteer as these are people who have chosen to remain connected to VSO and therefore accept VSO's understanding of volunteering.

in order to get the volunteer out to the placement, and the myth of an ideal type of volunteer was perpetuated by both sides in order to achieve that end, and in so doing both groups participated in the maintenance of that ideal type.<sup>81</sup>

In the understanding built up between VSO and volunteers, there was a fundamental belief, right to the senior levels of management, that volunteers predominantly conform to this type. But although these norms and expectations of behaviour were emphasised by VSO staff, and by many volunteers themselves, there was no compulsion. Rather there was a belief in the natural tendency of volunteers to project positive behaviour in their relationships. To formalise this as part of a volunteer role would, some feared, make volunteers over-react and behave inappropriately in their placement context:

*'I think if we make volunteers too conscious of the ways in which they can have an influence, an active influence on people, then we actually encourage them to behave in inappropriate ways.'* (Interview SMT2)

However, it is easy to imagine how the male volunteer in the scenarios discussed by the placement advisors (Scenarios five and six) might be able to integrate at the local level and assume a position of equality with those already in power in that context (colleagues, officials, etc). These are the relationships by which his ability to be a good volunteer is assessed. But based on his behaviour with the quieter woman volunteer, it

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<sup>81</sup> For example, 'selection validation' is a process of continuing assessment of volunteers throughout the pre-departure process. Trainers at the residential courses are required to mention selection validation at the beginning of the courses, but the illustrative story I observed concerned a volunteer who had displayed appalling behaviour on the course, but had still been allowed to go overseas (despite unofficial acknowledgement from the trainers that he should have been de-selected) (observation notes, PO2). For a volunteer *not* to be sent overseas s/he would have to exceed the norms of volunteer behaviour very seriously and obviously. This suggests that volunteers are cajoled and encouraged through the selection

was equally easy to speculate how he might not be able to challenge his own power in the context of his relationships with less powerful people in the context, notably in private relationships with women. Gender equality is a concern he may or may not come across in his professional role, but it is not included in the development of himself as a volunteer.

Thus, through constructing the ideal type of volunteer, VSO recognises the individual agent and her/his relationship with the context. However, as I go on to show, the meanings attached to this construction are negotiated to some extent between VSO and volunteers. The acceptable attitudes and behaviours with respect to gender in private roles is nevertheless a particularly problematic issue.

### ***6.2.3 Volunteer behaviour and the negotiation of the ideal type of volunteer***

There is some evidence from my research that the agreement between volunteers and VSO as to what behaviour should or should not be tolerated, and what kind of regulation is appropriate, contains assumptions that are constantly being re-negotiated. This process opens up the possibility of changes in the norms and practices surrounding gender roles and behaviours.

Although many volunteers in my research did seem to live up to the ideals of volunteering, in both their public and private lives, faith in this ideal was also expressed as misplaced by respondents:

*'There's a lot of faith in the idea that volunteers are special people and will live and work alongside people in their communities, but in fact it's perfectly apparent that that isn't so.'* (Interview CD2)

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process, rather than seriously challenged and monitored.

*'[A] volunteer has to be holier than the pope in a way...All his male colleagues might be in the shabeen... with the sex worker, and he can't. And we say, do as the Romans do, so that's a bit difficult.'* (Interview OD8)

It is clearly not reasonable to expect volunteers to be 'holier than the pope'. Thus both volunteers and VSO seemed to engage in a discretionary tolerance of volunteer behaviour based on a belief in the fundamental goodness of volunteers. However, what constitutes forgivable behaviour in this value system seems to contain a gender bias. For both VSO and volunteers, volunteering officially only contained notions of gendered impact as a public development issue.

Two groups of returned volunteers (from the Philippines, and a general group of returned volunteers) discussed a scenario about a male volunteer who was harassing a Filipina woman by text messaging. All were in agreement that this was a familiar case of a male volunteer going too far, mis-reading messages from the woman, and creating a misunderstanding that appeared as sexual harassment. There was a great deal of sympathy for the woman, and they agreed that the male volunteer should stop what he was doing as it was inappropriate. How volunteers engage in sexual/private relationships was considered to be part of their identity as a volunteer, and they were sensitive to how these relationships might appear:

*'[P]eople don't want to be judged on how ... they're behaving, or whether they're taking advantage [of local women]. They [feel] they might be judged.'*  
(Participant 4, GD1)

But it was almost universally not considered appropriate for VSO to interfere, because it was not seen as a serious enough issue<sup>82</sup>. There was agreement that the male volunteer

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<sup>82</sup> Except for one volunteer – one of the few male volunteers to take part in the discussions – who felt that

friend of the volunteer perpetrating the harassment should intervene to advise him to stop. This self-regulation places responsibility for volunteers' private behaviour onto the volunteers themselves and reflects the individualism found in the discourse of volunteering.

Challenges to self-regulation came from what I have described as 'feminist volunteers'. But when feminist volunteers tried to force official engagement with issues such as violence against women, they found considerable organisational resistance:

*'I have tried to engage VSO, both programme office and volunteers, in debate around volunteer behaviour in relation to violence against women, and sexual harassment, which are live issues in VSOP currently... I am now tired, I feel that I have no allies...VSO-UK does not have a gender position that I am aware of. In the recruitment stage gender should play a part and in subsequent training too. Otherwise we inherit volunteers who have no interest in gender and whose views are not open to change, thus sabotaging efforts of all who are trying to make gender a significant aspect of their placement and life in the Philippines ... I don't feel that gender is important to VSO, other than to appear trendy and [a form of] tokenism... If gender were seen within the human rights framework that children's rights are now located in, would people think it extreme that women have opportunities to make free choices and live safely?' (Email interview PHIL12).*

*'I do not feel that I have been supported significantly by the gender program; in fact, there have been occasions when I have felt 'isolated'... because of some of the strong views which I hold [on issues such as violence against women] ... I*

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the behaviour was worrying enough to be reported to VSO.

*have often felt that I was misunderstood or ignored when trying to discuss these types of issues. ' (Email interview PHIL17)*

For VSO staff in the Philippines, the struggle of these volunteers was that they were trying to reconcile their 'feminist' concerns, with working with 'unfeminist' organisations (interview PHIL9). This attitude also seemed to exist elsewhere in VSO country programmes. For example, the director of the VSO Pakistan programme indicated that he found that volunteers who were unable to accept the 'sexist' environment had more difficulties in becoming a successful volunteer.

*'Those volunteers who are successful and have a good time... are volunteers who accept, without agreeing with it, but accept the cultural norms of the country, particularly with relation to women. ' (Interview OD4)*

However, at least partially in response to the complaints raised by the feminist volunteers and organisations in the Philippines, both VSO Philippines staff and volunteers acknowledged unofficially that problems have, in the past, emerged with male volunteers' behaviour involving relationships with local women. Many (if not most) of these volunteers were regarded by the VSO Philippines programme office as good volunteers, in that they were able to work independently with their employer organisations, and their behaviour assimilated well into local structures. In VSO-Philippines, at the time of this research, there was no policy on volunteer behaviour when engaging in private relationships. Nor was there a policy on volunteer behaviour with each other, or with VSO staff members, which were areas that had been identified as 'difficult' in the recent past (interview PHIL8). But in response to volunteers and staff raising the issue of volunteer behaviour, the Philippines volunteer body chose to create a 'values statement'. A values statement, it was felt, was not as 'prescriptive' as a policy, and would enable volunteers to commit to a set of positive values and

behaviours, rather than trying to police negative ones – and thus it represents a commitment by the VSO-Philippines programme office and volunteer body to address the issue of volunteer behaviour, and so is a significant step forward:

*'tools to deal with people discriminating against each other on whatever grounds.'* (Interview PHIL8)

However, at this point it can also be characterised as continuing a system of self-regulation. As I have noted above, a system of self-regulation places responsibility for behaviour in the individual, and reflects the individualistic, values-based principles that, according to UNV (2001) and Watts 2002) underpin volunteering. The system is perpetuated by both VSO and the volunteers themselves.

Thus in this case, I suggest that signing up to a values statement can be seen as a step towards a collective agreement on private sphere norms and practices, and therefore part of a process of change. But on its own, without further change, this system might actually protect the private lives of volunteers from official scrutiny. The construction of volunteer identity and behaviour is thus confined to a particular notion of the public sphere. In the private sphere, VSO largely absolves itself of responsibility and encourages a belief in the natural tendency of volunteers not to misbehave, and self-regulation by the volunteer body in the isolated cases of transgression.

Feminist volunteers voicing concerns about volunteer behaviour (PHIL12 and PHIL17) were considered 'radical', as they pushed for far more organisational commitment to dealing with the private behaviour of volunteers. But, labels aside, these volunteers are important. They had been selected as volunteers, they participated in the activity of volunteering, and most importantly they were participating in the construction of volunteering. In doing so, these volunteers were attempting to renegotiate the

boundaries of the public sphere within which VSO considered it appropriate to construct norms for volunteer behaviour. If these volunteers had not raised the issues of volunteer behaviour, the VSO Philippines programme office may not even have developed the system of self-regulation around the 'values statement'. Volunteers thus operate in the context of their relationship as individual volunteers with the collectivity of VSO as an organisation, in which some are able at least to attempt to re-negotiate the norms and practices associated with the construction of volunteering.

### **6.3 The individual and the collective: controlling volunteers?**

The above analysis hints that power relations are an important dimension in negotiating norms and practices associated with gender relations. Volunteers experience power throughout their placements in different ways, and challenging unequal power relations is considered an important part of the volunteer experience. However, gender relations seem to be regarded differently to North-South inequalities, and volunteers are not expected to challenge or change gender power relations, but rather fit in and learn.

#### ***6.3.1 Power relations and volunteers in public, private and gendered lives***

Power is central to the volunteer identity and role (Watts 2002). 'Power over' and 'power to' are often complicated by assumptions of volunteer status in different cultural contexts and a volunteer might not have 'power over' as experienced by donor over recipient organisations, but s/he may experience the power to assert professional expertise, associated with control of resources (including knowledge, access to funding sources, etc), as indicated by this respondent:

*'Volunteers are both powerless and very powerful... We're all familiar with the idea that you arrive in country and you're treated like absolute dirt because*



*you're a volunteer and you're not being paid; you can't be very important... But also the volunteers who arrive trying to be relatively humble, but are actually in an amazingly powerful position - because you're the foreigner, you bring the resources and you've come here to help us, or work alongside us.' (Interview SMT3)*

Alternative visions of power - 'power within' and 'power with' (Kabeer 1994, Rowlands 1997) - can also be found in volunteering. These types of power are sometimes expressed as 'empowerment', and are important for feminist analysis because they allow those who hold such power to question and resist institutionalised structures of power<sup>83</sup>. For many respondents, questioning and resisting institutionalised structures of power between the North and the South are an inherent and important part of volunteering:

*'I do think that a really significant aspect and why I joined VSO is the ethos... I feel that it is a different way of interacting with other countries which is on a more equal footing and I see development as a lot about challenging power structures.' (Interview OD6)*

*'I think very much that there's something about the volunteering spirit, there's an ethos about volunteering ... One of the big things we've come up with is the reciprocity of volunteering... ' (Interview OD4)*

*'Most of the volunteers really have the right attitude ...and don't feel that they're any better than the people that they're going to work with... I think that*

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<sup>83</sup> The 'power with' could come from association with VSO itself, or it can come from the relationships volunteers develop with their employer organisations and local communities. Experiencing 'power with' VSO does not preclude volunteers from drawing on this element of power to question and resist organisational structures of power within VSO itself.

*volunteers are more on an equal basis with the local people.' (Interview OD8)*

*'Our volunteers are living in the same physical and material circumstances that they [the volunteers' colleagues] are, and that does make a difference, it gives you more credibility.' (CD3)*

In my observation of pre-departure training courses, volunteers were encouraged to think about how they would interact with local power structures in their professional roles, and how they would break down barriers that might exist in their relationships with local communities (observation notes, PO2). A particularly clear message about volunteers and relationships of power was expressed by this respondent:

*'The [message] is – don't come here with ideas of this is what you must do, you must listen to us, people here have the experience, and we're working together ... it's more like a solidarity than a power relationship.' (Interview RD5)*

The core dimension of volunteering, then, was perceived to be how volunteers *handled* the power that comes with being a volunteer, in their relationships with friends and colleagues.

*'We say all we ask for is that you do not abuse the power of being a volunteer' (Participant 3, GD2)*

The construction of the ideal type of volunteer seemed to both recognise overt forms of power (power over, power to) inherent in volunteering, and seek to create equal relationships between people, which itself promotes a different sort of power: the power that comes with altruism (Watts 2002). This is what was seen to distinguish volunteers from professional expatriate development workers, and VSO from other development organisations.

It is possible to apply this emphasis on breaking down North-South power relationships to gender relations. In the public sphere, some women volunteers, for example, described behaving in a way (for example, sitting on the floor with local women [interview OD4]) in which they could draw attention to gender inequalities by using their own, relatively powerful, identity<sup>84</sup>. In the private sphere, some male volunteers reported using their identity and behaving in a way which drew attention to inequalities (for example, sharing in domestic tasks usually carried out by women [interview SMT2]). Volunteers can and do have an impact on assumptions about gender relations as 'outsiders'. But this impact is neither obvious nor easy to bring about. Female volunteers are often not required to abide by the same 'rules' as the women in the community. Thus their behaviour might impact on what both men and women of the community see as 'possible' for women to do, but women of the community are still expected to abide by the existing rules and are very seldom able to exploit the new possibilities presented by the volunteer's presence (interview OD1)<sup>85</sup>.

It is also important to be balanced about how much of an opportunity there really is to address private sphere gender issues through volunteers. Generally speaking, when it comes to negotiating gender relations, it seems a volunteer is expected to fit in rather than challenge the power structures that underpin those relations. In many ways this

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<sup>84</sup> A specific example was given by Rachel, VSO Philippines volunteer, where in a previous placement she had been able to ensure through her own presence as a woman on the assessment panel that recruitment processes for female staff in the organisation were not based purely on the photograph applicants were required to submit (interview PHIL1).

<sup>85</sup> Female returned volunteers often referred to their status as that of an 'honorary man'. Thus their personal power as a volunteer was 'slotted in' to local level gender power structures, and their female identity was not allowed to influence the way in which women are more generally seen in that context.

reflects the reality of most volunteers, who are faced with such overwhelming gender inequalities that they are unable to make even small personal changes. However, it is also clear that volunteers find unequal gender relations an important part of their experience and impact as volunteers. They seem, however, to be constrained in their ability to question or learn from this element of their experience because of VSO's failure to make gender relations an explicit part of the volunteer understanding of power. This is in contrast to VSO's encouragement of volunteer understanding of North-South power relations. By extension, the failure in relation to recognising power in gender relations has also constrained VSO's ability to learn from volunteers' experience.

### ***6.3.2 Power in the VSO-volunteer relationship***

Volunteers also have access to different sources of power, and they can and do challenge both local power structures and also VSO's power by using their power 'within' (based on their identity as someone in possession of the soft and hard skills necessary to become a volunteer and embody VSO values). However, my research suggests that although VSO and volunteers recognise the power relations between volunteers and the local context, they do not acknowledge the power dynamics in the relationship between VSO and volunteers. This failure has ultimately constrained effective communication between them, and in consequence has hindered attempts to negotiate new norms and practices in the institutionalisation of gender.

For VSO, volunteering is central to their organisational competence both in their programmes and at the level of UK-based NGOs. However, for VSO to carry out its development programmes successfully through volunteers, it must to some extent have the power to 'control' volunteers and their actions. But the notion of control raises problems:

*'What are the boundaries of support and control?... The whole notion of volunteering [puts us] between a rock and a hard place. You can't in theory tell people what to do because they're volunteers, but they have to work within a framework, otherwise they do their own thing, and why shouldn't they? But from the point at which they've got a VSO badge on, there are issues there.'*

*(Interview CD3)*

How a relationship with volunteers is negotiated at different stages of their journey through VSO is connected to the negotiation of the ideal type of volunteer by both parties. A successful process of negotiation can provide high levels of commitment, but there will always be a loss of control over volunteers because the volunteers are primarily accountable to their employer organisations. The ultimate disciplinary measure that VSO can impose on volunteers is to remove their volunteer status. There are various benefits connected to volunteer status (insurance, emergency evacuation, flight home, end of service payment, etc), but primarily the phrase denotes an identity, and in order to maintain their volunteer status, volunteers voluntarily conform to a certain set of agreed behaviours and standards.

The relationship between VSO and volunteers can be traced back to the origins of the organisation:

*'We effectively started with recruiting school leavers, then graduates. [Now] we've moved away from that... and we've got more experienced people who are often much older... But I sometimes think that the organisation hasn't moved on.... The tone of voice in the volunteer handbook... [indicated that] VSO was speaking to children that it thought either were naughty or who were going to be naughty, which did not seem to me to be particularly appropriate in relation to trying to recruit independent-minded, self-starting, individuals.'* (Interview

As this senior staff member indicated, there are historical elements of VSO's relationship with volunteers that are patronising, and even contradictory given the more recent volunteer profile as older and more experienced<sup>86</sup>. However, there has also been what has been described as a 'sea-change' in VSO's attitude to volunteers, with emphasis on treating them as adults, and establishing a more professional, client-driven service pre-departure. This approach is reflected in a new volunteer handbook.

The shift has contributed to a lack of clarity surrounding the VSO-volunteer relationship, with unmet expectations on both sides:

*'Before they go we say you're a VSO volunteer, you'll be working with another organisation, but you are a VSO volunteer. Then they get there and we say, well you're not really a VSO volunteer - your employer is your employer, and that's the organisation you're with. Then as soon as they get back we'll get on the 'phone and say "hello, you're a VSO volunteer and will you do an interview about being a VSO volunteer?" No wonder they're thinking, bloody hell, what's going on?' (Interview CD5)*

Much of the lack of clarity has emerged from expectations regarding volunteer roles and specifically what is seen by VSO as programme office support, but what might be experienced by some volunteers as interference in their life and work, particularly relating to volunteer attitudes and behaviour. As VSO has shifted its emphasis more and more onto the development contribution of volunteers, their programme of support has changed to be more focused on professional skills for contributing to the development context. Volunteers, although introduced to development issues as elements of their life

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<sup>86</sup> See Chapter 4 for a discussion of how VSO and the volunteer profile has changed.

and professional role, were not in the past given the status of equal partners in VSO's mission, vision, purpose, etc. Their professional engagement with development was only framed in terms of understanding their placement and their identity as a volunteer, as this exchange during one of the discussion groups illustrates:

*'Placement Advisor 1 - I was at this recruitment event... and I was surprised by the number of people enquiring about VSO and they were talking about VSO being programmatic, capacity building and things...'*

*'Placement Advisor 2 - That would scare me! If volunteers starting talking about capacity building...'*

*(Participants 1 and 2, GD3)*

However, for some staff members, the terminology of working 'through' volunteers was inappropriate, and they suggested that this should be considered working 'with' volunteers to highlight the partnership:

*'I think that my experience in the last 3 years suggests that to say we are working 'through' is not actually as effective as if we used the term 'with', and therefore [also] changed the practice.'* (Interview OD6)

*'How do you view the volunteers? If you view them as professional colleagues, committed to the same ends as you are, then that's quite different than looking at them as a means to an end.'* (Interview OD10)

This idea was also expressed in the feedback workshop held with VSO staff in London, where different groups of staff articulated the idea that VSO should be working 'with' volunteers, rather than 'through' them. This would imply a greater degree of volunteer ownership of the VSO development agenda. Thus the relationship of power between

volunteers and VSO as an organisation might be more equal (Edwards and Hulme 1995, Fowler 1997, Lewis 1999). Volunteers, however, tended to experience the relationship with VSO differently depending on how they assimilated into the VSO ideal type. Some were happy to accept the type, felt their worth as a VSO volunteer, and found the partnership with VSO both comfortable and to some extent comforting. But other volunteers challenged VSO, because the type did not reflect their own personal values.

Some returned volunteers expressed frustration with what they saw as the structural power of VSO. This was illustrated in the session on the role of the country programme office at the returned volunteer weekend, at which I acted as observer.<sup>87</sup> When the relationship between volunteers and the country programme offices was referred to as a partnership through which volunteers should be able to channel concerns to the organisation, the group laughed. The programme offices' communication with volunteers was criticised as being '*benevolent listening*' (*observation notes PO3*), without any motivation to act on what was being heard.<sup>88</sup> VSO does have direct channels for volunteers to communicate with VSO in London, in case the volunteer relationship with the programme office breaks down. However, it seems that these channels had not been adequately communicated, nor were they accessible for many volunteers who felt that their relationship with the programme office was not positive enough to share their concerns. The Philippines programme office's partner advisory group and volunteer liaison group (PLG) were suggested as examples of structures through which VSO and volunteers could effectively communicate. But these structures were called '*mock democracy*' (*observation notes, PO3*). The power of the VSO programme offices was thus felt by volunteers to be considerable and the rhetoric of

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<sup>87</sup> I recorded the session through my own notes, and these were used both for my research and passed on to VSO for their own record of the session.

<sup>88</sup> A new policy requires programme offices to have mechanisms to respond to volunteer complaints.



participation and learning only served to reinforce the power relationship.<sup>89</sup>

These tensions reflect how VSO's power was felt by volunteers. However, the relationship between VSO and volunteers also seemed to acknowledge legitimate sources of power for volunteers, based on their hard and soft skills, and the fact that they were the embodiment of VSO's organisational competence and values. Also, as has been explored in this chapter, volunteers have participated (and at the time of this research were continuing to participate) in the construction of the ideal type of volunteer, and as such the power held by VSO is relational. In the context of VSO its relationship with volunteers was of a particular kind of development organisation, with its values embodied in volunteers. VSO was therefore dependent on volunteers legitimising these values, in order to claim its own legitimacy as a development organisation. This gives considerable power to volunteers.

This study shows how difficult it is to create a single representation of a body of people. In doing so, an organisation can exclude the representation of certain interests: for example, those interests associated with volunteer behaviour in the private sphere. However, the exclusion of private gender interests is not complete, as the representation of the organisation through individual volunteers necessarily includes both public and private spheres. Although a volunteer role is not explicitly constructed to challenge unequal gender relations, many volunteers were aware of these inequalities as they experienced them in their day-to-day lives, and did seem to make small personal challenges through their attitudes and behaviour. Generally, volunteers who took part in

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<sup>89</sup> These impressions are subjective, formed through observation of one returned volunteer weekend. They cannot therefore be taken to be representative, merely illustrative of this particular tension. The participants clearly attended that discussion because they had things to say about the volunteer relationship with programme offices.

this study had confidence in their identity as volunteers, whatever their relationship had been with VSO. This enabled them to make changes in their own behaviour, and for some volunteers (for example in the Philippines, above) it enabled them to begin to negotiate changes in the organisation.

## **6.4 Conclusions to Chapter 6: negotiating the discourse of volunteering**

In this chapter I have examined the element of individual agency in the construction of volunteering in development. The VSO ideal type of volunteer is individualistic and values-based, and contains assumptions governing the behaviour of volunteers which divide the public and private spheres in relation to gender. They are expected to engage with gender issues in the public sphere of development work, but volunteer 'private' behaviour is a matter at most for self-regulation. However, this construction has not gone uncontested, and volunteers *have* experienced and understood their role in the private sphere, whether or not this was a formal part of their development objectives, and some responses from within the organisation suggest that this has also been accepted by VSO. This has created an opportunity through which the division between the public and the private spheres associated with volunteering in development can potentially be acknowledged, challenged and re-negotiated in VSO.

How this negotiation process, and the relationship between individual volunteers and the collectivity of the organisation can be used to bring about organisational learning is the subject of the next chapter.

## **Chapter 7: Institutionalising gender equality into VSO - renegotiating the relationship between public and private spheres**

### **7.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I use my data to demonstrate the gendered archaeology (Goetz 1997) and deep structure (Rao et al. 1999) of VSO, and to show how volunteers as individual agents can both constrain and offer opportunities to improve organisational learning on gender equality in VSO. This addresses the third part of my research question: 'what is the potential for lessons to be learned in the organisation and change processes integrated into normal practice'?

In *'Focus for Change'*, the third VSO strategic plan, 'commitment to learning' has been identified as a key approach of VSO (VSO 2002). In my research, gender equality was identified primarily as a 'cross-cutting theme' (see Chapter 5). But, particularly when compared with HIV/AIDS (another 'cross-cutting theme', which was also the focus of a regional programme, an organisational campaign and staff and volunteer training, amongst other initiatives), the impact of programmes focusing on gender equality had not been as effective in bringing about organisational learning. Resistance emerged on the part of both the organisation and the volunteers, to expand the idea of learning on gender equality outside of the accepted framework of development (see also Chapter 6), and so learning was limited by the existing assumptions concerning the division between public and private spheres.

Accountability is an important mechanism for learning because it requires people to explain, discuss and review their actions. Accountability, in the context of shared goals and objectives, can be understood as the construction of knowledge and practice out of accounts (see Chapter 2). With volunteers, however, this process is complicated because

accountability is seen as 'voluntary' and therefore has to be negotiated. Such negotiation will involve the areas in which it is legitimate to ask people to account, and potentially includes negotiation over whether, for example, aspects of a volunteer's private life can be the subject of inquiry. In this way negotiated accountability sets an agenda for institutional learning through what it covers and does not cover. Negotiating accountability is therefore a major theme in this chapter.

In this chapter I first address the issue of organisational learning in VSO, outlining the constraints to learning, particularly learning on gender relations. I argue that whilst VSO has an idea of learning as integral to the organisation and its identity, translating this into action is more difficult. I then look at learning in the institutional context of VSO's 'partners', the employer organisations, and the challenge this poses for learning through volunteers, followed by the different ways in which learning takes place in the VSO-volunteer relationship. I then discuss the power relations between volunteers and VSO in more detail, and the implications these have for accountability and organisational learning. Finally, in this chapter I look at the different relationships of accountability between VSO and volunteers, and I argue that drawing on alternative meanings of power introduced in the last chapter, accountability can offer a potential space for the negotiation of shared meanings, and so become an important part of institutional learning.

## **7.2 Learning to be a development organisation: constraints to the institutionalisation of gender**

How organisations learn has been a subject of intense discussion in the context of development organisations (see Chapter 2). In this section I outline perceptions of organisational learning in VSO. The framework of development adopted by most

development organisations assumes boundaries between the work that an organisation undertakes and the gendered agency of the people who mediate that work (Goetz 1997, Rao et al. 1999). However people are located in a wider cultural/social environment, which is reflected in the organisation itself (Morgan 1997). Learning on gender therefore also involves confronting barriers to change that exist in the wider context in which the organisation and its agents operate.

### 7.2.1 *Self-perceptions of VSO as a learning organisation:*

The discourse of ‘learning’ is important to VSO as an organisation, and ‘commitment to learning’ is one of the approaches of the third strategic plan (*Focus for Change*)<sup>90</sup>:

*‘we will actively learn so that our work builds upon the skills, knowledge and understanding gained from experience’. (VSO 2002, p.1)*

This commitment to learning as an organisational priority was reflected in the responses of interviewees<sup>91</sup> to the question ‘can you identify three characteristics of a learning organisation?’, and summarised in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Three characteristics of a learning organisation** (summary of responses from 25 interviews of VSOL staff, covering all the characteristics mentioned by respondents)

1st characteristic	2nd characteristic	3rd characteristic
Double feedback loop – opportunity for review	... learning	... and feedback.
Ability to reflect on the past and act on it.	The ability to share materials/thinking/resources and learning across the organisation, within it.	The ability to experiment and either continue or stop.

<sup>90</sup> Along with partnership and empowerment

<sup>91</sup> This table is based on 25 interviews held with VSO staff in London between 16<sup>th</sup> October 2001 and 26<sup>th</sup> November 2002.

Time to learn/learning as part of a job description.	Filtering or facilitation of information.	Learning in different ways.
Listening - built into normal management and departmental meetings.	Enough space to reflect – built into management and departmental meetings.	Analysis that leads to action.
Reviewing and reflecting on experience, and actually doing something differently.	Action, experimentation and innovation encouraged and rewarded through an incentive structure.	Surfacing and sharing knowledge across the organisation.
Time for analysis, and communicating it to other people.	Putting analysis into practice – actually making the changes.	Reviewing how that change went.
Learning from experience.	Overcoming inter-divisional conflict through greater understanding of other priorities	

The responses reflect many of the elements of organisational learning found in the literature, such as double feedback loops (Argyris and Schön 1996), recognising and overcoming conflict (Morgan 1997, Fowler 1995), acknowledging the external environment (Hulme and Edwards 1997), and the importance of thinking, experimentation and innovation (Lewis and Wallace 2000). Although those to whom this question was posed were able to imagine what might constitute a learning organisation, they all also thought that these characteristics did not (yet) exist in VSO.

Some respondents suggested that there was a need for human or other filters in order for information to become learning, and most respondents identified the lack of time and space to learn as being the major constraint they faced. This was particularly so in the country programme offices, but also in London-based divisions. One respondent noted that when taking the time to think or to read she felt she didn't look 'busy' enough – where 'busy' is characterised as visible activity (in front of the computer, on the telephone, etc) (interview RD4). To some extent the Programme Development and Evaluation Unit (PDEU)<sup>92</sup> did have that 'space', and PDEU staff saw its role in that

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<sup>92</sup> At the time of this research, PDEU housed advisors on issues such as disability, HIV/AIDS and

way:

*'I think we are a team that is allowed that space, and I think organisationally we do need to be doing less [to allow that space to exist more widely]'. (Interview OD6)*

Other respondents equated learning with packaging and creating 'brands' (for example, the success of RAISA [the HIV/AIDS programme] was attributed to the way in which the programme was 'packaged' [interview CD5]). By 'packaging' most respondents meant that ideas of development and volunteering are brought together, with clear connections and easily identifiable benefits. Learning was also identified as creating a '*knowledge base*' that would lend legitimacy to advocacy work, '*developing internal expertise on a specific issue*' (interview CD1). Although such learning might have related to some of the work of PDEU, PDEU was a small department and was not able to develop the expertise so often associated with the policy departments of other development organisations. This, to one respondent, represented a lack of commitment to developing VSO's organisational knowledge (interview CD1).

Informal learning, such as shadowing people in their jobs, taking part in cross-divisional discussion or other groups, or attending external meetings and conferences, was also identified as important, but respondents were divided on how effective they thought informal learning was in VSO. Some rated informal learning highly:

*'Informal learning happens all the time, and I think more change comes from them than from what you would have designated and ear marked as a learning*

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education, as well as programme planning and evaluation. It was designed to encourage a cross-programme flow of information, and act as a focal point for research and learning within the organisation. Since this research, PDEU has been renamed the Programme Development Team (PDT).

*moment. ' (Interview OD11).*

However, another respondent also expressed some frustration at the lack of priority given to networking – an informal learning mechanism:

*'I had to make the case for being out of the office .... We're not really encouraged to get out there and mix and mingle – people do see the value, but I think we're quite over-burdened. ' (InterviewRD3 ).*

Many respondents interviewed in London, in terms of their own personal experience as VSO staff members, articulated that opportunities for VSO staff to learn were many and varied, and they were encouraged to participate in training or other learning opportunities (for example, interviews RD2 and RD5 mentioned observing other people in their roles for a day). However the use to which such learning was put was questioned.

*'I almost think some of the time that the formal learning structures are used as rewards... We've all seen the situation where people go off on training and come back and aren't encouraged or forced to put that training into practice. ' (Interview OD11).*

Another example of learning that was identified in the interviews was 'consultation', or the opportunity for the organisation and staff to engage together on a specific issue or set of issues (e.g. the process of writing the 3<sup>rd</sup> Organisational Strategic Plan – SP3). One of the respondents (RD2) noted that VSO's need to consult with and listen to people within the organisation slowed down processes almost to the point of stagnation. But others thought that processes such as consultation and listening made being a learning organisation 'tangible':



*'I think it's the ethos – it's where the organisation has come from, it's what its mission is, it's a values system'. (Interview CD3)*

*'It's really quite inspirational to see how much participation there actually is in the organisation, and people really are approached to feed in their perspective and their opinion on how the organisation is run.' (Interview RD3).*

*'A capture of learning... there's no doubt that the current thinking of our corporate strategic planning is reflecting quite a lot of debates that have been taking place overseas.' (Interview OD9).*

However others expressed reservations about SP3 as a learning process. Weaknesses were contained in distilling so much information, much of which came out unrecognisable from the original contribution when it was incorporated into the strategic plan (interviews OD9 and OD4), and *'strategies were plucked from the air'*, not having allowed enough time to reflect on what had been learned from the programmes and make decisions based on that review process (interview OD6). SP3 was also criticised as not being open to those who might want to question more fundamental messages of VSO, such as the organisational commitment to development (interview RD4). There was also concern about whose views were represented, as programme staff and volunteers in particular didn't have the time or the energy to contribute to the process (interviews OD9 and OD4). But respondents also expressed hope that a better monitoring and evaluation framework would enable the next strategic plan to be based on more systematic learning.

Change, as a result of learning, was seen to get 'stuck' between divisions. In particular, tensions between VSOL and the country programme offices were seen by some respondents as blocks to learning:

*'I think one of the things that makes us quite poor at learning as an organisation is that we have ... a large part of the organisation which is about getting volunteers to volunteer... And then another part of the organisation which is increasingly trying to use those volunteers to promote positive outcomes for poor people... [For] the development oriented part, their client and key stakeholder is the partner. And for the rest of the organisation their client and key stakeholder is the volunteer.'* (Interview OD7).

These responses suggest that VSO staff had an understanding of what it means to be a learning organisation. VSO has indeed changed considerably over the last 10 years, however many respondents were looking to the development of SP3 to give this change a more concrete shape from which they could work, and to improve organisational focus and coherence (interviews CD4, OD9, OD10, and CD1). But respondents also indicated that this change had not been brought about by the characteristics of a learning organisation identified in Table 2. Most respondents pointed to the leadership of the organisation, key thinkers joining the organisation in senior positions, and the influence of the Department for International Development (DFID) and the rest of the UK development community. The strategic planning process was perceived as a learning process, but based primarily on the direction given by the leadership of the organisation (interviews RD1, OD9 and OD4). Thus there seems to be a commitment to both individual and organisational learning, but many challenges are perceived in bringing it about.

### ***7.2.2 Learning on gender as a cross-cutting theme***

The perceptions of VSO as a learning organisation were less strongly signalled with respect to gender equality. When questioned about learning on gender equality, most respondents identified it as an important area of the broader development analysis on

which their programmes are based. In VSO, gender was identified as a 'cross-cutting theme'; in other words, as with HIV/AIDS<sup>93</sup>, an issue to be integrated into the country programmes and the organisation more broadly. However gender has not been given the high profile of HIV/AIDS, even though the work on HIV/AIDS has focused debate on sexuality and relationships, and hence linked the public and the private.

HIV/AIDS was a highly-successful cross-cutting theme because VSO staff saw it as an 'emergency', and the programme coincided with a high profile campaign in the UK. Because of this timing, RAISA - the HIV/AIDS programme in Southern Africa - succeeded in capturing the organisational imagination, and HIV/AIDS was raised in the consciousness of practically every respondent in the VSO-London headquarters:

*'I wonder if it speaks to some deep inner motivation when we all had our very simplistic interpretations of what we were going to do when we worked in the field... HIV presses that button.'* (Interview CD2)

Many respondents acknowledged the importance and success of RAISA, but some also urged caution when applying it as a model of organisational learning.

*'RAISA was a particular response that has been a really fantastic match of a number of different things that have come together... It would be difficult to do the same thing with education as an issue for example.'* (Interview OD10)

RAISA explored possibilities of working in different ways, and thus perhaps brought about some changes in working practices, for example experimenting with different types of partnerships, and the use of participatory methodologies. But according to the

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<sup>93</sup> For example HIV/AIDS is a focus of advocacy and campaigns, and there have been significant efforts to integrate HIV/AIDS into recruitment and training processes.

programme's manager in VSOL, it still worked within traditional VSO structures (interview OD2) and it was still '*volunteer-centric*' (SMT2).

RAISA also had repercussions for learning on gender, because it made visible issues of sexuality and 'private' relationships. These were an important part of developing volunteer, partner and wider VSO awareness, and volunteers were asked to examine their own sexual behaviour and the possible risks of returning from their placements HIV positive (interview OD2). Thus, there was a sense in which a link was made between the professional (or public) and private spheres of a volunteer's life, challenging the sense in which HIV/AIDS might have been seen within the framework of development as an issue separate from the agents themselves.

However, this element of RAISA was not replicated in other country programmes, because it was seen as a 'special' issue, representing a world-wide public health 'emergency'. For example, ISWID was an early initiative attempting to integrate gender equality as a cross-cutting theme in the Philippines country programme. But as explored in Chapter 5, whilst there were many successes from ISWID, there was almost no 'seepage' into other parts of the VSO-Philippines country programme. Furthermore, despite volunteer identity and behaviour being identified as important in the ISWID evaluations to the institutionalisation of gender equality into the VSO Philippines country programme and the organisation itself, it did not bring about significant progress towards addressing the gender relations of volunteers. In addition, the ISWID programme did not bring about any sustained changes to how other VSO Philippines programmes are designed and implemented. Although gender equality is often mentioned as a 'cross-cutting theme' by other VSO country programmes, its actual

incorporation into country programme plans is far from systematic or widespread<sup>94</sup>.

*I'd say at the moment that it's a sin of omission... I can't explain more than that, other than a collective sense of it hasn't reached that particular level [the level reached by HIV/AIDS].'* (Interview OD9)

The idea of 'cross-cutting themes' was not clear to most respondents, who thought it was similar to 'mainstreaming'. But there is still considerable debate about the effectiveness of mainstreaming as a project itself, as it can be seen as a way to integrate potentially transformative ideas into an already existing framework, without changing the framework itself (see Chapters 2 and 5). In the Philippines, although elements of ISWID which advocated for political change in the organisation itself and for changes to be made in the rest of the VSO Philippines programmes have not been carried through, the proposed follow-up programme, MAGIC (see Chapter 5), did attempt to 'mainstream' ideas of gender equality into the broader development agenda of VSO-Philippines on natural resource management. However this mainstreaming approach did not take up the challenge of exploring how analysing gender relations can potentially promote changes to understanding the role of volunteering in development.

This suggests that the deep structure of an organisation might limit the extent to which gender equality can be institutionalised. The deep structure of VSO does not just arise from the norms and practices of development, but also from the norms and practices of volunteering. In order to bring about the institutionalisation of gender equality into VSO, it is important that these norms and practices are recognised and challenged as an integral part of any organisational learning process. Organisational learning processes take place in the context of a particular organisation, but also need to take into account

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<sup>94</sup> One respondent wondered whether it was too early for ISWID to catch on more widely, with most

the wider context in which the organisation operates (Morgan 1997, Goetz 1997). Thus it is important to examine not just the agenda of VSO, but also the relationships between the organisation and its partner organisations, as representative of the context in which it is working.

### ***7.2.3 VSO's 'partners' and the institutional context of learning***

A potential space for learning on gender equality is in the relationship between VSO and its partners, a key element of the institutional context (Goetz 1997) of VSO's work. While Goetz focused on how gendered norms and practices of the local context prevented women development agents from operating as effectively as men, my concern was to examine the extent to which there was a two-way relationship between VSO and its partners to support learning on gender equality. So, for example, did VSO influence partners' strategic direction in addressing gender issues? Did partners influence the strategic direction of VSO? Examining the relationship gives some insight into how ideas of gender equality were being negotiated between VSO and partner organisations.

The importance of partnership was widely recognised in VSO (as shown in the analysis of key stakeholders outlined in Table 4 in this chapter [Section 7.4.1]). However, some respondents raised doubts as to the *quality* of partnership with employer organisations:

*'[P]artners haven't got nearly as much of a stake in what's going on as we have and as volunteers have... We're missing shared objectives at the partnership level. And so the reality is that the placement is just an activity. It's one activity towards some objectives for the partner, and we don't know what their objectives are and they don't know what ours are really. And they're certainly not shared unless it's by chance.'* (Interview OD11).

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people in VSO thinking, 'oh well, trendy Philippines can do that...' (interview CD2).

In the survey of employer organisations in the Philippines (Table 3, below), most noted that their relationship with VSO gave them a suitable volunteer, access to workshops and conferences, and engagement with their work. Some thought that they were consulted on VSO's strategic direction. But only a small minority agreed that VSO had influence on their own strategic direction. These responses suggest that there was only limited influence between VSO and the institutional contexts in which its development work took place.

**Table 3: Summary of responses to survey of employer organisations in the**

**Philippines** (based on a survey of 31 employer organisations, of which 12 responded)

VSO...	Agree/ Strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree/ strongly disagree
Provides a suitable volunteer promptly on request	*****		*
Does not require lengthy evaluation processes	*****	****	*
Invites us to conferences and workshops	*****	*	
Provides opportunities for funding or other forms of support	*****	*	
Actively engages with our work on a regular basis (apart from the volunteer)	*****	**	*
Provides strategic input into our organisation's plans	***	*****	****
Consults with us on VSO's planned strategic direction in the Philippines	*****	*****	*

Senior level respondents in VSO were convinced that using more participatory techniques would help to develop better learning partnerships with employer organisations, and this approach was put forward as a key strategy for improving placement assessment and evaluation, as well as building more strategic and

developmental programmes (interview OD10). But there is also a cost of participatory techniques in terms of skills and time, and respondents (particularly at programme office level) recognised these constraints to developing this approach (interview OD4). Furthermore, participatory techniques are not necessarily adequate to allow learning on gender equality to emerge because they can also reflect embedded norms and practices that perpetuate unequal gender relations (Guijt and Shah, 1998)<sup>95</sup>.

In the case of VSO and its partnerships with employer organisations, the negotiation of gender equality in their work took place via the volunteer<sup>96</sup>. From the limited information available from this survey, negotiation processes mainly addressed the issue of unequal gender relations in the community in which the volunteer carried out her or his work, and possibly in the employer organisation itself. This level of engagement provided few possibilities for the partnership to influence VSO's own organisational learning on gender equality, as it excluded examination of the role of the volunteer her/himself.<sup>97</sup>

Thus although there was some negotiation of a *development* agenda through volunteers by VSO (whether or not this included addressing gender and development issues), there was no recognition of the gender relations of volunteering. This aspect also reflects the

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<sup>95</sup> This is also the case for other social divisions, such as class and ethnicity.

<sup>96</sup> Many VSO programme offices did have more engagement with partner (employer) organisations, particularly those who had hosted two or more volunteers. Developing a more direct, longer term, relationship with partner organisations, with the volunteer (or volunteers, if multiple placements are appropriate) forming just one part of the relationship, is also a cornerstone of the 'programmatic approach' being developed by VSO at the time of this research.

<sup>97</sup> Although 'Significant Change' did seem to enable volunteers to feed back elements of their experience not included in the specific placement description, VSO was not able to incorporate these into their overall organisational learning processes.



possible opportunities and pitfalls in their relationships with employers:

*'Their [volunteer's] 'experience' in gender relations may 'open' the eyes of people of a different culture ... Whatever a person can contribute to the advancement of gender relations, he/she should do it because he/she 'may never pass this way again'. It is an opportunity of a lifetime' (employer organisation, The Philippines)*

This response from an employer organisation in the Philippines suggests that in this case the organisation recognised the potential contribution of volunteers throughout their experience, not just in their professional role. The recognition of actors, and the roles and identities of men and women as development agents is a key area for the institutionalisation of gender equality (Goetz 1997), and in the case of VSO, this suggests that there might be an opportunity for joint learning between VSO and its partners (employer organisations) via the relationship of the volunteer. However, as an integral part of this partnership, there should also be negotiation of the gendered norms and practices of volunteering. This requires learning between the organisation and the gendered individuals who are its volunteers.

### **7.3 Learning between VSO and volunteers**

Volunteers were seen by VSO staff in London and in the Philippines programme office as a key mechanism through which both VSO and employer organisations can learn, by sharing knowledge and understandings arising from the placement. Learning from experience was a key area of organisational learning identified by respondents in VSO (see Table 2 above). In particular, respondents at the management level of VSO in London (interviews CD3, OD7, SMT4) cited learning from returned volunteers as essential to VSO's work. In spite of this, it seems that VSO found it hard to capture

learning on gender equality through and by volunteers in such a way that it led to new action. Although volunteers' own learning was conceptualised as experiential, learning about gender issues was only ever framed in the context of (gender) training, not through the experience of volunteering and the placement itself.

Generally, learning through and by volunteers was also not considered by VSO staff in London and the Philippines to have been successful. Learning was supposed to be captured during the volunteer placement by the country programme office, through formal reporting, and programme office placement visits, as well as volunteer conferences and workshops (although in practice the success of this was often variable [interview OD2]), and after the volunteer's return at returned volunteer (RV) weekends (run four times per year). A common view of RV weekends was as '*closure for the volunteers*', and '*picking up the collective response*' (interview CD3).<sup>98</sup> However, some respondents (such as OD11, SMT4, OD7, OD6) also acknowledged that VSO did not learn well from its volunteers:

*'[I]t's one of the weakest areas of all.'* (Interview OD11).

For example, inadequate placement descriptions were an issue which had been ongoing for many years (my observation of an RV weekend also included this complaint [observation notes PO3]). However, respondents in VSOL admitted that very little action had actually taken place to address the issue (interview OD7).

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<sup>98</sup> There were other mechanisms through which VSO learns from returned volunteers, such as the Volunteer Liaison Group (VLG). The VLG is an elected body of returned volunteers who meet at RV weekends to discuss issues concerning VSO, organisational development and relationship with volunteers. They are also mandated to communicate issues that are received by them directly from serving or returned volunteers.

It seems that whilst VSO acknowledged the need to learn from volunteers, there were issues in the relationship between VSO and volunteers that created blocks to communication and learning, not only on gender equality, but more generally as well. One respondent speculated on what these blocks might be:

*'We're not very good at learning from volunteers, but part of that is that volunteers don't see it as their role to help us learn. ...The other part is that we're trying to continually fill new placements and working flat-out to do that. ...So the data itself isn't necessarily very reflective, and then we don't reflect on it... If there was more of a dialogue, then ... I think you'd have many more opportunities to ask: what's happened?'* (Interview OD7)

This statement was reinforced by the experience of the 'Significant Change' methodology. As indicated in Chapter 6, 'Significant Change' attempts to capture volunteer experience both in their professional and private lives, by asking volunteers to record any significant change that has happened, and to try to identify their role in bringing about this change. This attempt to identify learning was intended to facilitate volunteers' own learning and understanding of their experience, and encourage communication of that experience to VSO. The steer given to volunteers of this methodology is as follows:

*'The significant change you choose can be in:*

- 1. the lives of the beneficiaries of the organisation with which you worked, or*
- 2. the lives of individuals in the community where you lived, or*
- 3. colleagues with whom you worked, or*
- 4. an aspect of the organisation with which you worked, or the wider policy environment.*

*'A change can be big or small, positive or negative, and could affect a single*

*individual, a small group or an entire organisation...No-one would claim that this approach captures everything that is achieved in any one placement, and we expect that other achievements will be included in the final report. What choosing one or perhaps two stories will enable, however, is for at least some of the achievements during the placement to be brought alive and considered in more detail than can be done in the rest of the reporting system' (Significant Change information leaflet)*

The intention was to allow volunteers more space for reflection outside the objectives of the placement. However, the major problem identified by the VSO staff member charged with developing and implementing the 'Significant Change' methodology, was that much of the change identified by volunteers was '*without evidence*' (interview OD7). According to this staff member, it was not because evidence did not exist, rather it was that many volunteers did not know how to substantiate what they were saying. This respondent surmised that the lack of 'evidence' was at least partly due to the lack of adequate facilitation by the programme office to support volunteers in contributing to the process (interview OD7).

While the above processes and their limitations concerned VSO's learning through and by volunteers, volunteers' own learning was emphasised as an integral part of the volunteer experience, both pre-departure, and in their placements. Although volunteer pre-departure training was often praised in interviews with both VSO staff and volunteers, it seems that training on gender issues was not so well received. Pre-departure, some volunteers were given gender training, which included discussion of the placements and how gender would affect working relationships with colleagues and client groups, looking at communities and how to access information on gender relations, and looking at gender as a development issue (interview RD3). However, the gender training concentrated on volunteer placements – the volunteer role in the public

sphere. As I noted in Chapter 6, in the training courses where the volunteer role was addressed more broadly, in both public and private spheres, gender issues were less comprehensively addressed than other areas (observation notes, PO2 and PO4). In their evaluations of training courses, volunteers apparently reported that gender was one of the most repetitive areas of training (this was also a complaint received about HIV/AIDS), which resulted in the alienation of many of them from the issue (interview RD3). These views suggest that it was difficult to find appropriate ways of engaging with volunteers on gender issues.

However, training was only one part of volunteer learning, and individual learning from volunteers' own experience was considered to be a more important route through which issues could be addressed and understood. Thus respondents across the organisation expressed the expectation that volunteers were more likely to 'become' development workers on the job, than trained as such before departure. With respect to gender equality, this expectation reflected a learning process in relation to gender and development (i.e. in the public sphere) rather than gender issues in the private domain.<sup>99</sup> As the experience of the Philippines programme suggests (documented in Chapters 5 and 6), learning on gender relations did not include re-negotiating norms and practices of volunteering and opening up volunteer experience in both public and private spheres, but that there might be opportunities for this, were such initiatives as the 'values statement' to be extended and taken forward. In the next section I extend my analysis of the VSO-volunteer relationship to consider one way that organisational learning on gender relations might be taken forward: by undertaking a process of joint learning through negotiated accountability.

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<sup>99</sup> During interviews and conversations there was considerable interest in exploring ideas of masculinities and male volunteer learning on masculine behaviour in order to go about changing their own impact to

## 7.4 Accountability: a pre-requisite for learning

Accountability offers a potential space in which a process of joint learning can be undertaken, because of the particular dynamics of power in the relationship between VSO and volunteers. These dynamics (explored in Chapter 6) are based on the necessity of constructing and maintaining a system of shared values between VSO and volunteers, and the need to negotiate volunteer accountability within that system. In the sections that follow I examine the issue of accountability both of VSO and of volunteers, and I specifically explore the dynamics of the accountability relationship between VSO and volunteers in order to suggest a potential opportunity for negotiated, joint learning on gender equality.

### 7.4.1 VSO and upwards/downwards accountability

Whilst the usual structures (such as annual reports, financial reports, audits, donor evaluations, etc) seemed to be in place to ensure VSO was accountable to donors, trustees, and staff, a more complicated idea of accountability also emerged between VSO and volunteers, based on ideas of legitimacy and responsibility. In order to begin to understand how accountability was understood within VSO, I asked respondents<sup>100</sup> to identify whom they regarded as the three key stakeholders in VSO. Table 4 (below) reflects their responses.

#### ***Table 4: Key stakeholders for VSO***

(Based on 25 interviews with VSO staff in London. The respondents indicated 3 key stakeholders each. (\*) indicates a secondary response, or an afterthought).

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address gender inequalities better. This was seen as a possible way forward in this regard.

<sup>100</sup> These were respondents in interviews held with 25 people in VSO-London between 16<sup>th</sup> October 2001

Key stakeholder identified	Number of responses
Staff	(*)*****
Volunteers	*****
Partners/employer organisations	**(*)*(*)*****
Other (networking) partners	*(*)*(*)***
Beneficiaries	(*)(*)***(*)
People of the South/the poor	**(*)*
Donors – esp. DFID	(*)*****(*)****
Trustees	(*)***
Others	Trainers, recruitment division, national government, national advisory groups or consultative bodies.

Staff from all organisational perspectives recognised staff, volunteers and partners, as well as donors, as key stakeholders. However, they identified the difference between upward (to donors, trustees) and downward (to partners/employers, beneficiaries) accountability (Edwards and Hulme 1995, Fowler 1997, Lewis 1999) as a key weakness, as upwards accountability was given far more priority than downwards accountability. Mechanisms were in place for upward accountability (through annual and financial reports to donors, trustees, etc), and to some extent internal accountability to VSO staff (through line management, consultation processes such as for SP3, complaints procedures etc). But downward accountability to partners/employers was much more ad hoc.

*'Our accountability to trustees is much greater, much more seriously taken than our accountability down to partners ... there are whole new ways of thinking*

*that are needed in order to raise the importance of accountability in terms of process, as opposed to accountability in terms of are we spending the money right... It's the downward accountability that's missing in VSO'. (Interview OD10)*

However one key respondent suggested that, in practice, there was a system of direct accountability between VSO and employers, in that employers could get rid of the volunteer if the benefits did not outweigh the costs:

*'When there isn't a large cheque at the end of it you don't want to put up with quite so much, which is why that system of accountability is actually a better one than it sounds at first... They'll only continue to do it if they actually think that overall it's worthwhile'. (Interview SMT3)*

Despite this quotation about the power of 'exit', almost all volunteer and VSO respondents acknowledged the need for better joint accountability between VSO and employer organisations, and most cited participatory processes in placement planning, monitoring and evaluation, as a way to achieve this. Participatory processes in this context were primarily seen as useful for developing a sense of shared commitment between VSO and employer organisations. Accountability in this sense was more about negotiating development objectives rather than accounting for actions. However, it was also suggested that participatory processes could potentially be used to force partners to agree to and legitimise the VSO agenda, without the power to reform or change either the placement or VSO's wider strategic direction (observation notes, PO3 and GD2). There was then, a danger of reinforcing the established patterns of power.

Volunteers are key stakeholders as they are VSO's key means of carrying out its work. It seems that, on an immediate level, it was easy to build up relationships of



accountability and trust between VSO and volunteers:

*'By the nature of its work, very often the programme office's responsibility is for the welfare of the volunteers.'* (Interview CD2).

*'[I]f I was being truthful I'd probably say volunteers [were] probably more who I felt accountable to as they were the ones who'd be at my office.'* (Interview OD3)

For some respondents in VSO (for example, OD6 and OD10), the system for accountability in which VSO could be held to account by volunteers was better set up than for other stakeholders, such as partners. There were mechanisms in place for volunteers to participate in VSO programme development, evaluate their own experience and learning, and channel their thoughts (positive or negative) directly to VSO at different times during and after their placement. Thus, the historical relationship between VSO and volunteers (in which VSO did not hold itself accountable to volunteers), was recognised as something that was changing. Some senior level respondents (interviews SMT4 and OD10) understood that that volunteers were essential to VSO, and the success of its work was seen by these respondents as in large part dependent up on the quality of the volunteer experience. It was their relationships with the employer organisations and the placement context that gave VSO its connection with the communities in which its work was carried out, and therefore its 'legitimacy' as a development organisation in the eyes of their supporters (public in the UK and internationally).

There were, then, different types of accountability that were identified by respondents in VSO. There were accountability mechanisms which assumed a primacy of resources and assigned donors and trustees a certain amount of 'power over' the organisation and

the way in which it operated. However, there was also a broad recognition also of the need to maintain VSO's 'legitimacy' in the eyes of the public in the UK and internationally, and this meant ensuring employer organisation and community endorsement of the organisation and its work, expressed as downwards accountability. This need for legitimacy also required accountability to and from volunteers as the bearers of that legitimacy.

#### **7.4.2 Accountability of volunteers**

Accountability of volunteers (or holding volunteers to account) raises the particularly difficult issue of imposing accountability on voluntary action. How is it possible to control someone who is there out of choice? The sense of choice is important to the identity of a volunteer, and thus control must be minimised. But VSO volunteers are the embodiment of VSO's work, and this creates a complex relationship of power between VSO and volunteers, as VSO is ultimately accountable for the volunteer placement, in terms of the employer actually benefiting from the partnership. Thus volunteer accountability was located within the programme of work carried out by the programme offices with partners. Whilst volunteers' primary accountability was to their employers, it was the VSO programme director who signed the placement agreement not the volunteer. Thus formal accountability was directly between VSO and the employer<sup>101</sup> (interviews PHIL6, PHIL8 and PHIL9).

*'The programme office [is] accountable to its partners, it's accountable to the centre, it's accountable to a variety of things... And a volunteer isn't. He/She is an individual ...their work is situated within that strategic framework of the*

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<sup>101</sup> As it was too much to try to connect volunteers directly with poor and marginalised people, so it was also too much to hold volunteers directly accountable for the success or otherwise of volunteer placements.

*programme office.’ (Interview CD1).*

Minimising a sense of control seemed to be successful in the case of ‘good volunteers’ because these volunteers fitted the VSO mould and bought into VSO’s value structure. They were evaluated on their hard skills over a classic 2 year placement<sup>102</sup>, but formal mechanisms that asked volunteers to provide an account did not ask about the volunteer themselves or the volunteer experience outside of the placement objectives.<sup>103</sup>

Volunteers were also not expected to share VSO’s vision of development work and be accountable for carrying it out in the initial stages of their placement. The placement was seen as a ‘buying in’ process through which their commitment to development goals was expected to emerge (although not in all cases):

*‘I would expect that by the end of their placement volunteers will have really internalised those objectives, and believe in them, passionately, they’ll fight to make sure those objectives reflect what they think should be.’ (Interview OD11)*

Such buy-in could be seen as engineering a sense of accountability by volunteers to VSO. Thus, while volunteers could not be held directly accountable for the success or failure of placements (from the perspective of the programme director in the Philippines, volunteers were giving up two years of their life, and he did not necessarily see them as responsible to VSO for the money spent on them), their accountability might be negotiated through their relationship with programme offices. Other respondents at the programme office level felt that a volunteer’s accountability should

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<sup>102</sup> Volunteers were asked to report to VSO at 3 particular points in their placement (6 months, a year, and 2 years), against the original objectives of the placement.

<sup>103</sup> ‘Significant Change’ methodology was the first attempt to do this, but at the time of this research it was only in its pilot stage, and there were no plans to replace formal reporting mechanisms.

develop during their placement, but there was no compulsion and it was entirely possible that this never developed (interview PHIL8).

However, from group discussions with volunteers, it appeared that a volunteer individually might take responsibility for her/himself, which amounted to a different kind of 'voluntary' accountability. Volunteers expressed their accountability through a sense of responsibility, and whether to themselves or others they felt bound to account for the ways in which they discharged that responsibility, to the extent that it was almost seen as an affront to suggest otherwise:

*'Look! There are no guidelines of accountability! Everyone has different circumstances. Common sense and cultural awareness are my accountability yardsticks.'* (Email interview PHIL15)

*'[I feel a sense of] accountability to my personal principles. In particular my feeling on the issue of prostitution as it relates to volunteers.'* (Email interview PHIL17)

*'[I feel a sense of accountability for] my own values and the values of other people up to a certain level... Through this I am still able to carry out my own values and my colleagues feel freer and overcome their religious and/or cultural biases'.* (Email interview PHIL16)

*'For me the most important form of accountability is moral – since my service here is voluntary and I am not in the race for departmental promotion or any other gains than that of gaining personal experience/self learning'* (Email interview PHIL14)

This personal sense of responsibility expressed by volunteers seemed to cover not only

their work, and how far they were able to achieve their objectives, but also the way in which they went about both their work and their lives as volunteers. This perception suggests that the voluntary accountability of volunteers includes both public and private spheres. Furthermore, volunteers felt responsible for each other's behaviour, particularly in the private sphere.<sup>104</sup>

However, voluntary accountability, based on a certain set of values and personal commitment, appeared hard to foster in any formal sense. Even to whom a volunteer might feel accountable seemed to be a matter of personal choice. Within VSO, both in London and at the level of the programme office, VSO staff claimed that volunteer accountability to the organisation worked best through individual relationships and self-regulation by the volunteer body (i.e. volunteer to volunteer accountability), without monitoring or facilitation (interviews PHIL6 and PHIL9). Respondents commonly foresaw problems when asked about formalising volunteer accountability for private life, and people in VSO generally were not keen to talk about rules. When addressing issues (that no-one denied existed) of volunteer behaviour most VSO staff respondents saw the need as being to reinforce volunteers' sense of personal responsibility (interview OD7) rather than making them formally accountable and controlling their behaviour. Any kind of formal accountability mechanism for volunteer behaviour outside of the official placement was resisted (interview SMT2). Thus VSO's sense of control over volunteers and ability to call them to account was restricted to their work, i.e. the public sphere of volunteering. The private sphere was left up to an individual and collective sense of responsibility, and at best an informal voluntary accountability.

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<sup>104</sup> Group discussions with returned volunteers indicated that other volunteers might be able to deal with the situation of a male volunteer sending sexually explicitly text messages by mobile phone to the colleague of another volunteer (see Appendix 4 for the scenario, and Chapter 6 for analysis of the

Within the identity of a volunteer then, there was a sense of responsibility for the private sphere, but there were no mechanisms to help mould and support this sense of responsibility through formal accountability processes (the Philippines value statement, reported below and in Chapter 6 notwithstanding). Nor has there been any serious attempt on the part of VSO to negotiate such processes with volunteers. Gender in the private sphere, moreover, has been omitted from any notion of formal volunteer accountability, negotiated or otherwise. In this way a mechanism for organisational learning and potential institutionalisation of gender in VSO has been unable to deliver.

However, although it remained essentially within a system of self-regulation (see discussion in Chapter 6), by asserting the personal sense of responsibility that is widely held, some volunteers in the Philippines *did* attempt to renegotiate the boundaries between the private and the public by instituting the Philippines volunteer 'values statement'. Although this statement did not succeed in challenging the division between public and private spheres in the VSO organisational construction of volunteering (and therefore in the organisational deep structure), it could be seen as a significant first step towards recognising the impact of volunteers in their private sphere. Thus these volunteers extended the way in which both volunteers and VSO could potentially be held accountable for the gendered impact of volunteering and they opened the way for such a process to emerge.

#### ***7.4.3 The contribution of 'difficult' volunteers to institutionalising gender equality***

Volunteers need to believe that they are going to obtain something from volunteering that they could not otherwise get from their everyday lives to elect to carry out work on a voluntary basis. For many, this was a sense of worth, a sense of community, and an unequalled learning experience (see Watts 2002). These dimensions all contributed to a

volunteer's sense of power within/power with. In many cases this was enough to ensure that they conformed to a set of behaviours deemed to be part of a volunteer identity, and most volunteers did indeed seem to feel a real sense of responsibility for their work and their identity as a volunteer.<sup>105</sup>

However, not all volunteers conformed willingly to the ideals of volunteering. There was also a minority of 'deviant volunteers', who did not feel the same sense of voluntary motivation and personal responsibility, and transgressed the agreed norms of volunteer behaviour. VSO retained some overt power (power over) in the relationship with the volunteer, ultimately being able to withdraw their volunteer status. But there was a great reluctance to use this power, and in the case of the most seriously deviant volunteers (who presumably didn't care if they are volunteers or not) it was unlikely to work.

There were also volunteers who were sometimes thought of as 'difficult volunteers', such as those who complained about their living conditions or placement, or those who complained about other volunteers' behaviour and pushed for more effective accountability for a volunteer's gendered impact. During this research I came across examples of this second set of 'difficult' volunteers, who were more challenging in their relationship with VSO (for example the volunteers discussed in Chapter 6, who pushed for VSO to take responsibility for volunteer behaviour in the private sphere, and therefore take forward the recognition implicit in the Philippines 'values statement'). I use their example again here to illustrate how they might present a potential opportunity

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<sup>105</sup> A volunteer's sense of responsibility might explain why many volunteers can put up with living conditions that they would not otherwise accept. However, this also suggests that the assumption of altruism influences the lack of structures for volunteers to hold VSO to account for the quality of their volunteer experience.

to challenge the norms and practices of volunteering to better include gender equality.<sup>106</sup> These volunteers seemed to break out of the norms of volunteering, naming the invisible power structures that underlie volunteering within the context of development, and uncovering the mismatch between these norms and practices and their own (and in some cases their employer organisation's) values. They seemed to draw on their own sense of 'power within' or 'power with', arising from an appreciation of their own legitimacy and belief in their own values.

Thus some volunteers have challenged VSO openly to extend the boundaries that exclude gendered norms and practices of volunteers from scrutiny within the framework of development:

*'I believe and have discussed with VSOP that volunteers' behaviours should be accountable particularly in relation to gender, [including issues such as] prostitution, violence against women, homophobia, and sexual harassment'*  
(Email interview PHIL12)

As the quotation indicates, volunteers such as this one have attempted to re-negotiate the gender relations of volunteering, and to hold to account the gendered impact of individual agents. They at least have a starting point because the focus in VSO on the agent (the volunteer) allows private as well as public spheres to be acknowledged. It also allows a dynamic relationship between individuals and the organisation that can bring about negotiation, because volunteers are the embodiment of the organisation and its values. Therefore volunteers have some power (power within) to challenge VSO and attempt to bring about change in the organisation so that it better reflects their own

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<sup>106</sup> See also Chapters 5 and 6 for a discussion of how I have used feminist volunteers in scenarios discussed by groups, signalling attempts to renegotiate the public/private boundary in volunteering. These scenarios were accepted as 'realistic' by all discussion group participants.



personal values. The acknowledgement of the private sphere does not necessarily lead to the extreme response of total VSO control over volunteers' private lives as in this sense accountability is not about exerting control; it is about negotiation. Thus, extending beyond the 'difficult' volunteers, recognising and formalising volunteer accountability can be seen as an opportunity for re-negotiation of norms and behaviours, and, as such, a pre-requisite for institutional learning on gender in VSO.

## **7.5 Conclusions to Chapter 7: challenging assumptions in volunteering**

My data, analysed in this chapter, showed that VSO's work was carried out in the context of the three-way relationship between VSO, volunteers and employer organisations. Recognising the importance of relationships requires understanding of the different kinds of power yielded by the different partners, and the way in which these kinds of power relate to accountability and institutional learning. Although VSO might feel it has to account to employer organisations, because of the power the latter hold in terms of being able to exit from a volunteer arrangement, it nevertheless has the power of control over resources in this relationship. Employers and volunteers do not have the 'power over' that is represented by control of resources, but they do have a 'power within' and a 'power with' on which they are able to draw using the importance of 'legitimacy' in the norms and practices of VSO's development work. Thus, although volunteers and employers in my study were not able to demand accountability in the same way as donors or trustees, they were able to negotiate their interests in the relationship with VSO, by drawing on the importance given to their role.

In some cases the volunteer body seemed to take on the role of monitoring and self-regulating the gendered relationships of volunteers. But although this gendered impact

of volunteers and the self-regulation by the volunteer body was recognised by both VSO and employers, it was not supported by formal recognition of the way in which the private sphere holds significant gendered interests. This means that there was a lack of both formal volunteer accountability, and ultimately organisational accountability on the part of VSO for the gendered impact of volunteering in the private sphere.

Accountability can be an important source of joint learning and an input into the negotiation of shared meanings. This chapter has argued that if gender equality is understood to permeate the boundaries between public and private spheres in the context of accountability in volunteering, then the negotiation of gendered norms and practices could include the interests of individual agents and their relationships with others in both their public and private lives.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this concluding chapter is to draw together the insights I have gained from this research and explore them in the light of broader questions which have emerged. In so doing I will point towards the wider implications of the research, not just for VSO and other volunteer-sending organisations working in development, but for other development organisations as well. Although the research has specifically focused on the activity of volunteering, the arguments developed are relevant for other professional development agents, who share a commitment to many of the same values and principles. The conclusions to this thesis, as well as providing specific lessons for VSO and other volunteer-sending organisations, can therefore provide wider insights for development organisations, and the individuals working within them.

I begin by summarising the theoretical basis and findings of the thesis. I then reflect on three important areas: the role of individuals in development; the relationship between power, altruism and being a volunteer; and the relationship between accountability and learning. Finally, I consider the implications for institutionalising gender equality.

### **8.2 Theoretical basis**

My theoretical basis has drawn from feminist perspectives and critiques of development, which argue that changes in the norms and practices associated with the public/private spheres, and consequent changes in gender relations are essential to achieve gender equality in development. Whilst an understanding of the importance of the public/private spheres exists in much gender and development (GAD) theory and

practice, how development organisations relate to development agents as individuals involved in and experiencing gender relations remains a challenge to be met for the successful institutionalisation of gender equality.

The practice of volunteering has enabled a closer investigation of individuals in development and the importance of the inter-relationship between individuals and their organisation if the challenge of changing norms and practices on gender, confronting both public and private spheres, is to be met. Volunteering also poses challenges for accountability and the management of intra- and inter-organisational relationships, and the need for organisational legitimacy to be rooted in these relationships in order to maintain public trust. In addition, individual agents have a special role as bearers and communicators of organisational values, which has implications for the sources of power on which they are able to draw in their relationship with the organisation.

Although an understanding of the role of individuals as development agents is in itself important, the aim of this research was both to uncover assumptions in the understanding of gender relations in development, and to examine how these can be challenged and changed. The institutionalisation of gender equality into development involves sustained changes in norms and practices, and challenges to current patterns and hierarchies. The thesis argues that such challenges offer a potential for learning, which could involve the constant negotiation and renegotiation of meanings and understandings, particularly between the organisation and its development agents, the volunteers. It thus involves organisational learning and learning how to learn, to encapsulate new norms and practices. The thesis argues that such processes may challenge the deep structure of organisations, which reflect embedded understandings of gender relations both within the organisations themselves and in the context in which development organisations carry out their work.

## 8.3 Summary of findings

### 8.3.1 *Development and gender relations in VSO*

I began to develop my argument by looking at current development discourse in development organisations, and specifically how this affects the understanding of gender relations and gender equality in VSO. I found that in recent years VSO has constructed itself as a ‘mainstream’ development organisation, which incorporates a distance between development agents and the context in which they are engaging, both professionally and personally. I examined assumptions through my data sources about gender relations contained within their understandings, and how those were illustrated in the context of VSO and its development programmes. The understanding of gender relations at the strategic level of development objectives focused on the goal of gender equality in development concerns such as livelihoods, education and health.

Programmes tended to emphasise ‘mainstreaming’, addressing and strategically framing an understanding of gender equality in the context of VSO’s existing priorities in its development work.

However, part of thinking differently about development and gender equality involves questioning the division that exists between the public and private spheres. This is particularly the case when examining the idea of individual agency, and the impact of development agents on the context in which they are working. The issue of agency was highlighted by the research because as a development organisation that works through volunteers, VSO cannot distance itself from the development agents themselves. There is a tension held within the organisation between volunteers as the focus of VSO’s work, and development as the focus of VSO’s work. This tension is illustrated by VSO’s carefully crafted understanding of volunteering in the context of development, and volunteers as the ‘tools’ of VSO’s development work. But a focus on volunteers as

individual development agents presents a conceptual challenge to the understanding of development found in VSO's programmes. Thus I was able to examine the understanding of volunteers and volunteering contained within VSO, and identified this as a key factor in how gender relations can be understood to affect individuals and their role in development.

### ***8.3.2 Volunteers as (gendered) agents of development***

The focus on volunteers as individual development agents led to a more in-depth examination of volunteers and their relationship to VSO. I looked at how development is carried out through volunteers (what VSO is able to do through country programmes made up of volunteer placements and other associated activities), by volunteers (what volunteers do in their placements), and of volunteers (what happens to volunteers themselves). I also looked at VSO's understanding of volunteering contained within an ideal type of volunteer, and found embedded assumptions which relate to the gender relations of volunteers. These are illustrated by the norms of behaviour expected of volunteers, in their professional role and in their private life. In their public life volunteers are encouraged to replicate the values of the organisation, and VSO will monitor volunteer behaviour, and at the same time, in their private lives volunteers are encouraged to self-regulate, which disassociates their behaviour from the organisation. The public and almost communal nature of volunteering thus exists in tension with the more individualistic elements of volunteering, which acts to shield volunteers' private behaviour from scrutiny. This has implications for how volunteer roles and relationships are understood in development, as both gendered individuals and as bearers of a collective organisational identity.

To investigate volunteer roles and relationships further, I analysed some of the elements of power in the context of volunteering by examining the relationships that VSO

volunteers have with both the local context, and VSO as an organisation. By conceptualising different sorts of power, and examining the values base of volunteering, I identified both the visible hierarchies of volunteering and of VSO as a development organisation, and the more invisible structures of power associated with discourse and the construction of the ideal type of volunteer. These organisational and discursive structures of power uncover a further element to the relationship between VSO and volunteers, which nuances the understanding of power and authority in this context. Foucault's analysis of discursive power is that it is relational. In the case of VSO, in order to ensure voluntary 'buy in' of the volunteers to the organisation's values, these values have to be negotiated. The relationship between volunteers and VSO can thus pose challenges to the structures of power, and so also potentially present opportunities for the renegotiation of the norms and practices of gender relations in volunteering.

The insights from this research therefore not only present the division between public and private spheres as a challenge to be overcome in the institutionalisation of gender equality into volunteering, but also uncover how this division affects the gender relations that exist between individuals and the organisational collectivity. Through this study of volunteers I have thus gained further insights into the nature of agency both in discursive and active development practice, and come to an understanding of how structures of power in development organisations can affect the gender relations between development agents and their context, and vice versa.

### ***8.3.3 Organisational learning, accountability, and the institutionalisation of gender equality***

The data in this study have shown that although the discourse of learning is an integral part of VSO's approach to development, it is difficult to change structures, such as reporting procedures, that exclude private gender interests from consideration.

Changing norms and practices to meet the demands of gender equality that takes into account both private and public spheres may challenge fundamental assumptions about how an organisation and its employees see themselves and their activities. Learning to do things differently may thus involve the negotiation of norms and practices in both public and private spheres, to address both development policy and the interests of development actors. My research suggests, in particular, that VSO has had difficulty in grappling with the more permeable boundaries between public and private spheres that exist in the role of volunteers, in relation to building new understandings of gender equality in the organisation.

Organisational change includes the relationships between individual development actors and the collective identity of the organisation itself. As an organisation that works through volunteers, VSO experiences a particular challenge in this respect. I looked at the relationship between individuals and the organisation by focusing on lines of accountability and whether and how accountability was a source of learning. VSO gives accounts of itself to its partners (and the communities in which VSO lives) through its volunteers. Volunteers are in turn accountable to VSO, however this accountability is partly dependent on a voluntary 'buy-in' to the values, norms and practices of the organisation, and therefore involves negotiation. Learning about and negotiating assumptions about gender equality in both public and private spheres is thus multi-directional and complex. Although this is widely recognised by volunteers and in VSO, formal organisational processes do not yet reflect the considerable challenges to bringing about organisational changes in gender relations.

## **8.4 Concluding discussions**

My findings have raised three important discussion areas that extend the relevance of



this thesis to the wider set of development organisations: the role of the individual agent in development, power in the context of volunteering, and accountability in managing voluntary action.

#### ***8.4.1 The role of the individual agent in development***

Volunteering, because of the central element of agency, provides an opportunity to challenge and renegotiate the boundaries between public and private, and how gender relations are institutionalised in development organisations. Individuals are not a new element in the study of gender and development. Authors such as the contributors to Porter et al. (1999) have pointed to the importance of changing the attitude of individual people working in organisations as well as putting in place organisational structures and processes. Other authors (such as Goetz 1997 and Carson 1995) have pointed out the importance of individual gendered identities of development workers in understanding constraints to how gender equality is incorporated into development work through concepts such as gendered time and space, horizontal and vertical gender segregation, and gendered working culture. In all these writings, the division between the public and the private spheres is central to understanding how gender roles and identities are constructed, and how this contributes to the maintenance of gendered norms and practices in the context of development organisations.

There is an individualistic nature to volunteering, based largely on assumptions of altruism, independence and self-regulation. These assumptions also constrain an understanding of the impact of volunteers in the private sphere, because although volunteers are expected to contribute and learn both personally and professionally, it is only their professional and 'public' role that is scrutinised and counted, leaving the corresponding private role up to the assumed essential 'goodness' of volunteers. This constrains the organisational understanding of gender equality. However, the role of the

individual volunteer in development is not limited to a gender-neutral technical or professional contribution, and gender relations of individuals in both public and private are important in determining their impact on the development context.

Volunteering for many people is personal: they do it because they believe in what they are doing. But there is also a sense in which volunteering is a very public experience, with every aspect of a volunteer's life, for example, up for scrutiny by the local community. If the private sphere of a volunteer is formalised into something that is evaluated, the 'personal' nature of volunteering becomes far more 'public'. Within VSO there have been respondents who have argued that it is the personal commitment and values of people that make them volunteer, and these will disappear as soon as they are made a formal part of their public role. But there have been other respondents who have argued that organisations such as VSO should be held responsible for the gendered impact of agents carrying their name. This thesis has argued that the boundaries between what is considered public and private are blurred for VSO and its volunteers. This presents an opportunity and an imperative to renegotiate the understanding of gender equality in the organisation, including the attitudes and behaviour of its development agents.

However, VSO's conception of volunteers as a means to the end of development work effectively excludes them as individual people and therefore their experiences<sup>107</sup>.

Development organisations have become technically specialised, which emphasises the importance of technical, or professional, development knowledge and work and de-emphasises the importance of an individual's personal relationship with the context.

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<sup>107</sup> 'Significant Change' does seem to offer the potential for VSO to learn from volunteers as individuals, but at the time of this research, there were difficulties incorporating the results of 'Significant Change' stories into VSO's organisational learning processes.

Maintaining this division between development agents and the work that they carry out continues to exclude the interests and agendas of those who seek to change the deep structure of the organisation and acknowledge the role of development agents themselves. Without these changes, the institutionalisation of gender equality into development organisations will be limited. VSO, because of its focus on volunteers, has an opportunity to address the division between development agents and development practice, and forge a new understanding of the institutionalisation of gender equality into development organisations more generally.

#### ***8.4.2 Altruism, power and volunteer motivation***

The institutionalised norms and practices associated with volunteering can also be found in many other development organisations which do not necessarily work through volunteers. It is particularly emphasised in the case of volunteers, whose motivation to work with an organisation is more overtly based on the way in which their association with organisational values can bring them personal reward or gain other than financial or professional advancement. But even for professional development workers, their own commitment to the cause for which they are working is important, and this commitment of an organisation's staff is important to maintaining its legitimacy (Korten 1984b and 1990).

The evidence presented in this thesis suggests that individual volunteers position themselves discursively vis à vis both their placement situation and VSO as an organisation according to how they are able to relate to the norms and practices of volunteering as individuals, in both private and public.<sup>108</sup> In development work, and particularly in the context of volunteering, the relationship between agents and their

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<sup>108</sup> See for example Goetz 1997b and her description of female development workers for a Bangladeshi development NGO, and Mayoux 1999

organisations is carried out within a system of values, which are both individual and organisational. This value system contains assumptions which are a reflection of the institutional context, such as the values placed upon 'male' or 'female' tasks in an NGO working culture, or the way in which time and space is structured to reflect assumptions about the relationship between public and private spheres in a development NGO (Goetz 1997). But in this study of volunteers, the basis of their work and their identity as volunteers is rooted in values, that are shared with the organisation. This element of shared values in the relationship between VSO and volunteers appears to represent a space within which individuals can potentially negotiate their own agendas and interests with the organisation.

The individual in development then is a bearer, negotiator, and communicator of values, in both public and private spheres. The relationship between individual and organisational values is discursive, and is continually re-constructed. An analysis of power relationships in this thesis has shown that volunteering, because of these nuances of power, provides an opportunity for volunteers, both as gendered individuals and as bearers of the collective organisational identity, to attempt to renegotiate the organisational understanding of gender equality. It is possible that volunteers might identify ways of doing this, such as acting as alternative role models, or contesting the division between public and private spheres in volunteering and development through VSO-volunteer fora such as volunteer conferences or volunteer publications. Because of the common values base of development organisations, this analysis of power may also be relevant for other development agents, who may then be able to negotiate understandings of gender equality with the organisation with which they are associated.

#### ***8.4.3 Learning, accountability and managing voluntary action***

This study has identified that major challenges for the institutionalisation of gender

equality into volunteering are the successful development of learning and accountability processes, through which norms and practices associated with gender relations can be negotiated at the level of individual volunteers, and at the collective level of the organisation itself. At the moment these processes of learning and accountability do not exist adequately, and this is a constraint to the institutionalisation of gender equality.

Although learning is a major part of VSO's own organisational identity, the processes of learning in VSO maintain a division between the public and the private spheres of people's lives. It is suggested that successful learning can be brought about by coming to a deeper understanding of the relationships between gendered individuals in the learning process itself. This includes understanding how these relationships include or exclude gender interests by maintaining the boundaries, and related power inequalities, between public and private spheres in development work. Although new assessment methods such as 'Significant Change' are being developed, at the time of this research the organisation was experiencing difficulties using the results from such processes in a meaningful way for organisational learning, because such lessons concerning the impact of volunteers fall outside of their placements. This frame of reference constrains VSO learning from the private sphere of volunteer roles, and excludes aspects of gender relations contained in this sphere. If a volunteer's private sphere were acknowledged as important and relevant, then this would open routes through which learning might take place and the understanding of gender equality in development rethought.

In the context of development and development organisations (as well as other voluntary organisations) accountability can be used to signify not the real power of partners to demand accountability, but their importance in bestowing legitimacy on the policies and operations of the organisation. The concept of accountability is the focus of much discussion in VSO. The partnership between volunteers and VSO, whilst unequal,

is based on a system of volunteered accountability, where volunteers are expected to share the values of the organisation and choose to conform to its norms and practices. However, institutionalising gender equality into VSO and into other development organisations requires not only that norms and practices change, but also the power structures that maintain them. As long as accountability is based on a shared sense of *existing* norms and practices (rather than a shared sense of the need to change these) this eliminates the possibility of it contributing to institutional learning.

## **8.5 Thinking differently; doing things differently?**

As always with this kind of research, I have encountered tensions, which at first glance can appear to contradict the whole analysis. For example, the study of volunteering in this thesis has served to highlight challenges to institutionalising gender equality, as it appears rooted in a highly individualistic set of norms and values. However, with a deeper understanding brought about by using feminist analysis of volunteering and development I have not only been able to uncover some fundamental challenges to the institutionalisation of gender equality, but also offer a more dynamic relational context in which to meet them, reflecting the Foucauldian analysis of discursive power as relational. Rather than constraining the institutionalisation of gender equality, it seems that the individualised value base which underlies the discourse of volunteering in the context of development might actually contain opportunities to challenge and change norms and practices associated with the gender relations of development organisations. The application of a feminist gender analysis to development organisations sheds a unique light on the way in which individual agents interact both as gendered individuals and as representatives of a collective identity, in both public and private spheres. Indeed, this research has identified some cases where individual volunteers have attempted renegotiate a broader understanding of gender equality by drawing on the

importance of their own personal values and commitment as representatives of the organisation through their role as volunteers.

This research has specifically focused on volunteering. Volunteering has been compared with paid or professional development work at several points in the thesis, in order to identify the specific elements in the discourse and the practice of volunteering in development. However volunteering and other types of development work, whether as the staff of a development organisation or as consultants, are all values-based activities. The material here thus holds insights for other development organisations. By applying a feminist analysis to the role of values in the practice of development, it is possible that the material in this thesis could contribute to rethinking dominant assumptions held in development organisations and development practice more generally.

However, thinking differently is only the first step to the institutionalisation of gender equality. It is possible to build on the insights of this research with further research into the power dynamics of the individual/collective relationship in development organisations, and into opportunities for institutional learning.

There have been significant attempts to address gender issues in VSO, and even during the period of the research the situation has changed and improved. The regional HIV/AIDS programme in Southern Africa (RAISA) is putting more emphasis on gender equality as a key goal, particularly concentrating on the issue of gender violence. There have also been attempts in this region to address the issue of men and masculinity, recognising the importance of male volunteers and their behaviour in addressing both gender issues and HIV/AIDS. Corporately, even just by engaging with the research, VSO has demonstrated an organisational will to address the issue of gender equality.

There are many constraints to addressing gender equality in an organisation such as

VSO, both at the level of its development work and at the level of individual volunteers. As I emphasised at the beginning of this thesis, in carrying out a more conceptual analysis I do not mean in any way to detract from the difficulties that are experienced by VSO volunteers and staff who are dealing with gender inequality on a day-to-day basis. The key element from this analysis of particular relevance for VSO, I believe, is to understand gender equality in the context of development as concerning behaviours, values and practices, and not just reduced to a technical element of an already existing framework of development work. I believe that an organisation like VSO, with such a central role for individual agents in its organisational purpose, has the opportunity to explore and exploit the dynamic relationships of power that exist between the organisation and volunteers, and negotiate new truths and discourses in its understanding of gender equality.



## Appendix 1: Coded list of interviews, with dates and locations

Date and place of interview	Code	Interviewee and division in VSO
May 31st 2001, Marinduque Philippines	<b>PHIL1</b>	<i>Rachel, VSOP volunteer</i> followed by tour/observation.
June 6th 2001, VSOP office, Manila	<b>PHIL2,</b> <b>PHIL3</b>	<i>Francesca, VSOP staff</i> <i>Maria, VSOP staff</i>
June 11th 2001, VSOP office, Manila	<b>PHIL4</b>	<i>Luis, VSOP staff</i>
June 9th 2001, my accommodation, Manila	<b>PHIL5</b>	<i>Claire, VSOP volunteer</i>
June 10th 2001, VSOP office, Manila	<b>PHIL6</b>	<i>Henry, VSOP staff</i>
June 15th 2001, VSOP office, Manila	<b>PO1</b>	Participant Observation at planning meeting for gender training - <i>Henry, Claire, and</i> <i>one additional volunteer</i>
June 20th 2001, Isis International, Manila	<b>PHIL10</b>	Director and one additional staff member
June 21st 2001, VSOP office, Manila	<b>PHIL7</b>	<i>Jose, VSOP staff</i>

16th October 2001, VSO London	<b>RD1</b>	<i>Martin, recruitment</i> <sup>109</sup>
	<b>RD2</b>	<i>Nicola, recruitment</i>
23rd October 2001, VSO London	<b>OD1</b>	<i>Mary, overseas</i>
	<b>OD2</b>	<i>Elliot, overseas</i>
30th October 2001, VSO London	<b>CD1</b>	<i>Victor, communications</i>
	<b>CD2</b>	<i>Tamsin, communications</i>
	<b>OD3</b>	<i>Edward, overseas</i>
7th November 2001, VSO London	<b>SMT1</b>	<i>Christine, SMT</i>
	<b>CD3</b>	<i>Erica, communications</i>
8th November 2001, telephone interviews	<b>PHIL8</b>	<i>Frank, VSOP staff</i>
	<b>PHIL9</b>	<i>Henry, VSOP staff</i>
13th November 2001, VSO London	<b>OD4</b>	<i>Marion, overseas</i>
	<b>SMT2</b>	<i>Paul, SMT</i>
20th November 2001, VSO London	<b>OD5</b>	<i>Malcolm, overseas</i>
	<b>OD6</b>	<i>Tania, overseas</i>
28th November 2001, VSO London	<b>CD4</b>	<i>Mike, communications</i>
	<b>CD5</b>	<i>Kim, communications</i>

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<sup>109</sup> Staff interviewed in VSO London are identified by a pseudonym and their 'division' (recruitment, training, overseas, or communications). I have not identified them by role, as for some this would identify them and the interviews were carried out on the basis of anonymity. Indicating their division helps to locate them in their relationship to volunteers (pre-departure, serving or returned). Appendix two contains a full list of interviewees in alphabetical order.

	<b>OD7</b>	<i>Cameron, overseas</i>
8th December 2001, VSO London	<b>GD1</b>	Group discussion with Philippines returned volunteers
19th December 2001, VSO London	<b>RD3</b> <b>RD4</b>	<i>Oliver, training</i> <i>Emma, recruitment</i>
3rd January 2002, VSO London	<b>GD2</b>	Group discussion with RPMs and HOPs
14th January 2002, VSO London	<b>OD8</b> <b>OD9</b> <b>OD10</b>	<i>Nina, overseas.</i> <i>Thomas, overseas</i> <i>Rosemary, overseas</i>
8th-10th February 2002, Harborne Hall, Birmingham	<b>PO2</b>	Participant Observation at Preparing for Change pre- departure volunteering training
13th February 2002, VSO London	<b>SMT3</b> <b>OD11</b>	<i>Andrew, SMT</i> <i>Colin, overseas</i>
19th February 2002, VSO London	<b>GD3</b>	Group discussion with RSOs and placement advisors
26th February 2002, VSO London	<b>SMT4</b> <b>RD5</b> <b>RD5</b>	<i>Wendy, SMT</i> <i>Terry, training</i> <i>Seth, training</i>

1st-3rd March 2002, Harborne Hall, Birmingham	<b>PO3/GD4</b>	Participant Observation at Returned volunteer weekend, including group discussion on 2 <sup>nd</sup> March
15th-17th March 2002, Harborne Hall, Birmingham	<b>PO4</b>	Participant Observation at Volunteers and Development, pre-departure volunteer training weekend
Email interview, February 2002	<b>PHIL11</b>	<i>Amy, VSOP volunteer</i>
Email interview, February 2002	<b>PHIL12</b>	<i>Cynthia, VSOP volunteer</i>
Email interview, February 2002	<b>PHIL13</b>	<i>Ed, VSOP volunteer</i>
Email interview, February 2002	<b>PHIL14</b>	<i>Leila, VSOP volunteer</i>
Email interview, February 2002	<b>PHIL15</b>	<i>David, VSOP volunteer</i>
Email interview, February 2002	<b>PHIL16</b>	<i>Heidi, VSOP volunteer</i>
Email interview, February 2002	<b>PHIL17</b>	<i>Claire, VSOP volunteer</i>

## **Appendix 2: Full list of interviewees (with roles) in alphabetical order**

Rene Acosta - SCRUM programme manager (*VSOP staff*)

Boyd Alexander - gender programme manager (new) (*VSOP staff*)

Chris Bain – Head of Programmes (*Overseas*)

Rachel Bartlett – Directorate (*SMT*)

Karabi Baruah – VSO volunteer (livelihood development) (*VSOP volunteer*)

Ken Bluestone – Advocacy (*Communications*)

Daniel Bradley - Training (gender) (*Training*)

Amanda Jane Brady – VSO volunteer (river conservation) (*VSOP volunteer*)

Geoff Brown – South-South PDD (ex-Philippines PD) (*Overseas*)

Norma Burnett – PDEU (*Overseas*)

Alexia Coke – research project supervisor/PDEU (*Overseas*)

Helen Dabin - VSO volunteer (gender) (*VSOP volunteer*)

Suzanna Davis and Mavic (ex-VSO) - Isis International, Manila (Director)

Jose Sluijs Doyle – PDEU/HIV-AIDS (*Overseas*)

David Eminson – Pakistan programme director (*Pakistan programme, overseas*)

Darren Evans – VSO volunteer (river conservation) (*VSOP volunteer*)

Barbs Fortunato - VSO South-South volunteering director (ex-gender programme manager) (*VSOP staff*)

Selina Fox - Press office (*Communications*)

Lucia Fry – Global education (*Communications*)

Mark Goldring – Chief Exec (*SMT*)

Karl Green – VSO volunteer (multimedia specialist) (*VSOP volunteer*)

Dave Hampson – Programme director (*VSOP staff*)

Chris Hanley – V+D (*Training*)

Carol Hatchett – Rural livelihoods and social development skills team (*Recruitment*)

Evelyn Henderson - Education PDEU (*Overseas*)

Angie Iyabo Bambose – VSO volunteer (counselor/Social worker) (*VSOP volunteer*)

Daniel Jones – PDEU (*Overseas*)

Michaela Jones – volunteer assessment (*Recruitment*)

Penny Lawrence – OD/SMT (*SMT*)

Ruth Lewis – returned volunteers/SMT (*SMT*)

Arlene Mahinay - gender programme manager (*VSOP*)

Carole Milner – Returned volunteer office (*Communications*)

John Nurse - PDEU/volunteer selection (*Recruitment*)

Brian Rockcliffe - PDD/SMT (*SMT*)

Bob Ruxton – PDEU (*Overseas*)

Ronet Santos - SPARK programme manager (*VSOP staff*)

Alan Smith – Regional programme manager Southern Africa (*Overseas*)

Sharon Taylor - VSO volunteer (natural resource management/gender) (*VSOP volunteer*)

Richard Usher – Volunteers and Development course (*Training*)

Simone Vd Kaaden – VSO volunteer (deaf counsellor/advocacy) (*VSOP volunteer*)

***Group discussion participants (with roles):***

Philippines returned volunteers - Simon Brook (agriculturalist); Nina Collins (distance learning specialist); Andrew Drummond Smith (small business advisor); Jan Falkingham (protected area design specialist); Audrey Hutt (goldsmith trainer); Bronwyn Kineavy (environmentalist); Antonio Massella (agriculturalist); Emma Newton (physiotherapist); Anne Roberts (environmentalist).

Regional Programme Managers (RPMs)/Head Of Programmes (HOPs) - David Bishop (RPM for West Africa); Jonathan Burton (HOP for Africa); Pat Callahan (RPM for EE + Central Asia); Sarah Hall (RPM for South Asia); Sheila Smith (RPM for Caribbean/Pacific).

Regional Support Officers (RSOs) and Placement Advisors (PAs)- Veronica Bartlett (PA primary education); Lindsey Boother (PA English, arts and language); Ruth Hunter (RSO W Africa); Sophie Lane (RSO Caribbean + Pacific); Alan Large (PA technical and media); Sarah Macaskell (PA technical and media); Sarah Palmer (RSO Balkans); Liz Pride (RSO South Asia); Jacob Rudd (Business and management).

### **Appendix 3: Interview outline questions**

The interviews used the 3As as a conceptual framework to explore elements of institutionalisation. The first set of questions explored assumptions surrounding ideas of gender, development and volunteering:

- What is the distinctive role of volunteers in development?
- What are the implications of moving towards a development model for VSO's identity? VSO's work? VSO's relationship with volunteers?
- Where does gender fit into VSO's development work?
- Is gender recognised as an issue with VSO as an organisation?
- Is gender recognised as a power issue in volunteer training?

The second set of questions looked at attribution of organisational learning processes:

- What is the learning in the process of change that VSO is going through? Is the strategic planning process a learning process? How?
- What three things would constitute a learning organisation?
- What is the role of formal/informal learning for volunteers and staff? What are the benefits?
- How does VSO learn from volunteers? From staff? Is this successful?
- Is RAISA<sup>110</sup> a model of organisational learning? How is it different from ISWID?

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<sup>110</sup> At the time of the interviews, RAISA was a regional initiative in Southern Africa focused on the issue of HIV/AIDS. It had been very successful in terms of its profile in the organisation, with advocacy



The third set of questions asked about accountability, of both VSO and volunteers, trying to probe the accountability structures and assumptions contained in the VSO-volunteer relationship:

- Who are the VSO stakeholders?
- How is VSO accountable to these stakeholders?
- Who are volunteers accountable to? How?
- What responsibility does VSO have for volunteers in country?
- Is there a sense of shared objectives within VSO (between divisions)? Between VSO and volunteers? Between VSO and partners?

*Questions emailed to serving volunteers:*

- What assumptions are embedded within volunteer perceptions of volunteering and development?
- How learning is attributed in the placement and the relationships between VSO/volunteer and volunteer/employer?
- What lines of accountability exist in a volunteer placement?
- What assumptions are embedded within volunteers' understanding of gender?
- What tools and practices contribute to changes in volunteers' understanding of gender?

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campaigns and staff and volunteer training also taking place. I used this as an example to contrast with ISWID (the Philippines gender programme).

## **Appendix 4: Group discussion vignettes/scenarios**

### ***Scenario 1:***

VSO has been working for some time with an organisation in Southern Africa, and the partnership has developed particularly well with a focus on HIV and AIDS, as the organisation has a strong focus on this issue.

For a continuation of this partnership, the director of the organisation decides that it would be most useful to develop a gender strategy to deepen and render more effective the organisation's focus on HIV/AIDS. This is welcomed by VSO, and a female, feminist gender volunteer is placed in order to develop a 'gender strategy'.

When she gets there she finds that her placement was designed by a previous director, and that the present director is hostile to gender, regarding it as irrelevant and a development 'fad'. In her meetings with the director of the organisation, the volunteer argues that gender analysis is relevant and indeed must be integral to not only the work of the organisation, but also to the way in which this work is carried out. This does not convince her employer. However, her counterpart (a man) is very keen on developing an analysis of how gender relations can be addressed by his organisation, and she feels satisfied in her day-to-day work, if unconvinced that it will have a lasting effect. But she experiences some hostility from the director of the organisation, who uses her identity as a western feminist to accuse her of 'not fitting in' to local culture.

Please answer the following questions, recording your answers on a flip-chart:

- What explanation can you offer for this situation having arisen?
- How could the situation have been prevented?

- What should the volunteer do now?
- Should this behaviour be reported to VSO? What structures exist for her to do so?
- What should VSO do?
- What do you think VSO would realistically do?

### ***Scenario 2:***

A male volunteer ('Henry') is in the office of his employer organisation. He is happy in his work, has a very good relationship with his counterpart ('Amy') and employer organisation, and many friends in the town where he lives, including another male VSO volunteer ('Derek'). One day his counterpart, Amy, is very distracted and seems to have been upset. Henry asks what is wrong and Amy reveals that for the last month or so she has been receiving increasingly sexually explicit text messages on her mobile phone from the other VSO volunteer in the town, Derek. She had met Derek through Henry, and they had seen each other subsequently a couple of times. She had not been keen on pursuing the relationship, but had carried on a text messaging conversation, believing this to be innocent friendship. However, now she's really upset and frightened that Derek might follow up these messages with physical contact.

Please answer the following questions, recording your answers on a flip chart:

- What explanation can you offer for this situation having arisen?
- How could the situation have been prevented?
- What should her colleague volunteer do?
- Should the situation be reported to VSO? What structures exist for this to be done?
- What should VSO do?

- What do you think VSO would realistically do?

### ***Scenario 3:***

VSO arranges a gender training session for a mixed group of volunteers. The training is held in a coastal resort, and lasts two days. The first day consists of an introduction to gender and development theory, with some discussion of the national development context. The second day consists of a presentation on the cultural context of the country, and how volunteers' behaviour might affect those around them. The facilitator is a knowledgeable feminist from a well known national women's group. At the end of the first day, the volunteers feel as if the information given was interesting but irrelevant to most of their placements. Most of them do not take it seriously, and regard the whole thing either as a waste of time, or as a good excuse for a holiday and spend most of the night getting drunk together in the resort bar. The second day comes across as a generalised attack on machismo volunteers. The male volunteers are deeply offended, and the female volunteers are split between those who feel alienated and excluded, and those who are pleased that finally VSO is addressing the behaviour of male volunteers.

Please answer the following questions, recording your answers on a flip-chart:

- What can be learned from this situation?
- How could the situation have been avoided in the first place?
- How should VSO organise gender training sessions to address issues that are important to all volunteers, but not alienate some or any of them?
- What mechanisms exist for volunteers to pass on their reactions?
- What, realistically, do you think that VSO would do in this situation?

#### ***Scenario 4:***

Staff in a VSO programme office are confronted with an allegation of sexual harassment by a male volunteer against another female volunteer. Both the male and the female volunteers in question are known to be popular amongst the other volunteers, and the volunteer body seems to have split between the two camps. They are both also successful in their placements, with good relationships with their respective employer organisations. The problem has escalated to crisis point, with the female volunteer threatening to either take legal action or to return home early.

The male volunteer is called in to the programme office to talk about the situation informally. However, when he is confronted with the allegation he responds that it is nothing to do with VSO, he only feels accountable to his employer organisation and they seem perfectly happy with his behaviour.

This is indeed true, as when the employer organisation is approached on the subject, they say that they are happy with the volunteer's work, and that they believe that his private life is nothing to do with VSO or with them. They are against interfering in any way with the situation.

Please answer the following questions, recording your answers on a flip-chart:

- What can be done?
- What do you think VSO would realistically do?
- How would this be different if a) it was a local woman being harassed by the male volunteer? And b) if it was a local man harassing the female volunteer?
- What is the future of VSO's relationship with this partner organisation?

- What can be learned from this situation?

### ***Scenario 5:***

At a volunteer assessment weekend, there is an excellent volunteer called Joe. Jovial and friendly, he is a good team worker and has excellent skills that can easily be matched to several placements. He is in his late 30s, and already has considerable experience abroad. During the assessment weekend, one of the other candidates (a young woman, who is unlikely to be selected as a volunteer because of her lack of experience and what seems to be natural shyness) reports that she experienced unwanted flirtation and sexist jokes from Joe. Joe, when confronted with this report, said that he was just trying to include her in the group and bring her out of herself a bit more.

- How would this situation be handled?
- What would be the consequent report on Joe?
- How would this affect his potential volunteer role?

### ***Scenario 6:***

At a volunteer training weekend, there is a woman volunteer called Rachel, who is well qualified, but sensitive to some of the bantering of the other volunteers, and openly hostile to some of the male volunteers, particularly Joe. She complains to the trainers that her politics are feminist and that this spans both professional and personal areas of her life. She doesn't appreciate the sexist behaviour of some of the male candidates and is openly and directly critical of the VSO assessment and training process. Her skills are in demand and she could fill several placements, but there are some concerns raised about her sensitivity and diplomacy.

- How would this situation be handled?
- What would be the consequent report on Rachel?
- How would this affect her potential volunteer role?

*The scenarios were discussed by the following groups:*

- *Returned volunteers from the Philippines – 9 people (scenarios 1,2,3)*
- *Returned volunteers at the RV weekend – 14 people (scenarios 1,2,3,4)*
- *Regional programme managers (VSOL) – 5 people (scenarios 1,4)*
- *Placement advisors and regional support officers (VSOL) – 9 people (scenarios 1,4,5,6)*

## Appendix 5: Survey of employer organisations in the Philippines

- i) Please rank in order of priority (1 as the highest, 9 as the lowest), the qualities that you expect a volunteer to bring:

Technical/specialist/practical skills

The ability to transfer technical skills

The ability to identify and make applications for extra funding

The ability to understand and learn about the work culture of the organisation

The ability to contribute positively to the work culture of the organisation

The ability to contribute positively to gender relations in the workplace

The opportunity for increased networking

The ability for communication and interaction with people in a different culture

The ability to adapt to living in a different community

In the questions which follow below, please indicate the extent of agreement or disagreement with the statements at the beginning of each question (by marking with a tick on a hard copy, or by marking 'yes' on an electronic version, in the box provided). You are given additional space to expand on your views if you wish.

- ii) As well as bringing core technical skills, we also expect a volunteer to contribute to the following elements of our work (please only mark against the contributions which are *additional* to the volunteer's core technical skills).



	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Management and admin.					
Fundraising					
Gender analysis					
Strategic planning					
Participatory tools					

Please use this space to expand your answer if you wish:

- iii) Volunteers from other parts of the world can make a positive contribution to the understanding of gender relations in our organisation.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Volunteers can contribute to gender analysis					

Please use this space to expand your answer if you wish:

- iv) Gender relations are culturally specific and it is therefore difficult for volunteers from other parts of the world to contribute to an understanding of gender relations in the Philippines.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Gender relations too culturally specific					

Please use this space to expand your answer if you wish:

- v) We believe that it is too much to ask a single individual to make a specific contribution to our organisation on issues such as gender and development.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Too much for volunteer to contribute to gender					

Please use this space to expand your answer if you wish:

- vi) VSO's training and preparatory process has been adequate to prepare a volunteer for their placement with our organisation.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Volunteer training adequate					

Please use this space to expand your answer if you wish:

- vii) The work that the volunteer is carrying out now is very similar to VSO's placement description.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Volunteer's work is similar to placement description					

Please use this space to expand your answer if you wish:

- viii) A VSO volunteer should only be accountable for the work that s/he has been contracted to undertake.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Accountable for contracted work					
Accountable to VSO					

Please use this space to expand your answers if you wish:

- ix) A volunteer should be accountable (a) only to the employer; (b) only to VSO; (c) equally to the employer and VSO; (d) more to the employer than VSO; (e) more to VSO than the employer.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
(a) Only to the employer					
(b) Only to VSO					

(c) Equally to employer and VSO					
(d) More to employer than VSO					
(e) More to VSO than employer					

Please use this space to expand your answers if you wish:

- x) We believe that a volunteer's private life is not our concern or VSO's concern (please indicate how far you agree with this statement both for you as the employer, and for VSO).

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Private life not employer's concern					
Private life not VSO's concern					

Please use this space to expand your answers if you wish:

- xi) We expect VSO to monitor and assess the work that a volunteer does on a regular basis, and provide professional support where needed.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
VSO should monitor volunteer					
VSO should provide professional support					

Please use this space to expand your answer if you wish:

- xii) We expect VSO to provide personal and welfare support to volunteers throughout their placement.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
VSO should provide personal support					

Please use this space to expand your answer if you wish:

- xiii) VSO provides the following elements of partnership in its relationship with us:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Provides a suitable volunteer promptly upon request					

Does not require lengthy evaluation processes					
Invites us to conferences and workshops					
Provides other opportunities for funding or other support					
Actively engages with our work on a regular basis (apart from the volunteer)					
Provides strategic input into our organisation's plans					
Consults with us on VSO's planned strategic direction in the Philippines					

*Please indicate by marking in this box whether or not you are happy for your answers to be shared anonymously with VSO:*

Yes/no

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## **Other VSO Philippines documents:**

1. VSO Philippines Gender Sectoral Analysis
2. ISWID Self-Evaluation Instrument
3. SCRUM information leaflet
4. SCRUM Mid-term evaluation
5. SPARK information leaflet
6. SPARK programme structure